The Factors Influencing the Achievement of a U.S. Governmentally-Sponsored International Education Exchange Program's Objectives: Reflections of Alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine which factors influence the achievement of program objectives for Kyrgyz Republic alumni of the U.S. governmentally sponsored UGRAD program. The UGRAD program was designed to provide university students from the former Soviet Union an opportunity to study at an institute of higher education in the United States for one academic year in the hope they will develop skills and attitudes that they can take back home to help their countries transition from the Soviet past to a democratic future. To explore this topic, an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was used, in which 72 UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic were given an online survey to ascertain information about their UGRAD experience and their progress towards achieving the UGRAD objectives. Then, 11 of the survey participants were selected by using maximum variation sampling and then given in-depth, qualitative interviews. The three main findings of the research were: 1) community college placements for UGRAD participants were found to be ineffective; 2) UGRAD participants with highly developed academic and/or professional goals tended to achieve program goals than those with lesser developed plans; and 3) the more quickly a UGRAD participant can turn their experience into employment or academic opportunities upon returning home, the more likely they were to achieve program objectives. These findings can be useful for international education program administrators to help ensure that future programs maximize the benefits of similar international education exchange programs.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Research

In the 2013 fiscal year, United States federal governmental agencies spent nearly $1.7 billion on international exchange and training programs (IAWG, 2014). Given the enormity of this investment, it is reasonable to assume that U.S. governmental officials believe there to be both value and benefit from investment and participation in international exchanges. To add further credence to this assumption, the $1.7 billion spent was distributed over 193 different exchange programs administered by 59 different governmental entities, including all 14 Cabinet-level departments (IAWG, 2014). Governmental agencies as disparate as the State Department, Government Accountability Office, and the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board all sponsor programs of international exchange. Workers in seemingly every division of the U.S. federal public sector are exposed to different people, cultures, and ideas through governmentally funded international exchanges. It is believed that the outcomes of these exchanges will improve the lives of the participants, increase the effectiveness of the organizations in which they work, and contribute to a more peaceful, just, and prosperous nation and world (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2017).

Education and training programs which involve international exchange have long been an important component in U.S. foreign policy and outreach (Richmond, 2003; Yazdani, 2007; IAWG, 2014). Several pieces of legislation passed in the U.S. over the last 60 years have paved the way for public funding for a broad range of international exchange programs (Vestal, 1994), including the sponsoring of international students in U.S. institutions of higher education. As originally conceived, the rationale behind the funding international exchange were to:

- increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange
- to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world
- to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world (Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, 1961).

While U.S. governmentally funded international exchange programs today are still based on the classic principles of cultural exchange and mutual benefit as listed above, the rationale for continuing to fund international exchange has been expanded to include elements of national security. The rationale now includes the following assumptions:

- The best way to protect U.S. freedom is by ensuring that others around the world are free;
- U.S. security relies on a global effort to secure the dignity and rights of all people;
- U.S. prosperity depends upon the prosperity of other nations (U.S. State Department, 2007).

From the above, we can see that international exchange programs are accepted by many as an effective way to promote understanding, peace, security, and prosperity. Each of the 193 sponsored international exchange programs differs in terms of who is eligible to participate, what countries the exchanges are conducted with, and even how the

individual programs are administered, but each is designed to produce outcomes which explicitly or implicitly address the above cultural and security rationales (IAWG, 2014).

It is evident from the vast sums of money spent on international exchange programs, as well as from the widespread use of such programs throughout all sectors of the U.S. government, that government officials believe public funding of international exchange programs can promote freedom, security, and prosperity. What is unclear is the extent to which such programs actually do what they are designed for. From both an examination of the scholarly literature and from a presentation by a high-level bureaucrat in the field of international education (Craven, 2007), it is clear that little is done on the part of the U.S. governmental departments, exchange program administration agencies, and scholars to determine the extent to which participants in U.S. governmentally sponsored international exchange programs actually succeed in accomplishing program objectives. While it is not uncommon for programs to publicize and promote examples of individual success resulting from participation in international exchange programs, very little research has been done in regard to the outcomes of programs in their entirety. Moreover, little is known empirically about the programmatic and individual variables that contribute to whether or not program participants meet the program objectives.

Further, while there is a growing body of literature that examines the impact international education exchange, and more specifically study abroad, has had on participants from the U.S. (Citron, 2002; Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Paige et al, 2009; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009; Atkinson, 2010), very little has been done to analyze the impact that study abroad participation has had on participants from other countries that come to the U.S. as part of their program. This gap in the literature

represents a significant lack of understanding considering that close to 99% of the 3.5 million participants in U.S. funded international exchange programs in FY 2013 were citizens of countries other than the U.S. (IAWG, 2014). With almost the entire population of people who participate in the U.S. federally-funded international exchange programs being nationals of countries other than the U.S., there is a need for research that focuses on the outcomes of non-U.S. participants in U.S. governmentally international exchange programs. Additional research is needed to gain a better understanding of the factors and experiences which either enable or prevent participants from successfully achieving their program's goals. The more that is known about what contributes to a "successful" exchange program, the more likely we are to create, administer, and implement programs that consistently produce the desired outcomes (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002).

The Premise

The central premise of this study is that underlying any international exchange participant's ability to meet the program's objectives is that person's ability to be competent at living and functioning in an intercultural context. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) write that any sojourner must possess a certain degree of sensitivity and an ability to modify their behavior out of respect for cultural difference in order to be effective in an intercultural experience. Research shows that cultural learning on the part of international education exchange participants improves student performance in both target language acquisition and disciplinary coursework (Engle & Engle, 2012; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). The cultural learning that occurs as part of an international education exchange program is called, among other

things, intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) and intercultural competence (Hammer et al, 2003). Intercultural sensitivity is "the ability of a person to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (Hammer et al, 2003, p. 422), and intercultural competence as "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer, et al, 2003, p. 422). But certain intercultural skills, such as sensitivity and competence, are not innate (Bennett, 1993); for an individual to possess them implies a developmental process (Braskamp et al, 2010). Skye Stephenson calls this process cross-cultural deepening (2002). Deepening to Stephenson is cognitive in nature, and is characterized by a perceptual shift in the sojourner's mind that gives that person the ability to consider the events, values and beliefs from the vantage point of more than one cultural framework (Stephenson, 2002). This study employed a modified version of Stephenson's triad to examine which factors influence the achievement of exchange program objectives for one group of participants from the Kyrgyz Republic.

This study examines the various factors that may have an impact on international exchange experiences, and address the aforementioned gap in literature by studying the entire population of participants from the Kyrgyz Republic in the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program in Eurasia and Central Asia (UGRAD). The UGRAD program is relevant because it is one of several U.S. governmentally-funded programs that offers citizens of economically-developing countries the opportunity to come to the United States for either educational or training purposes. The UGRAD program is for citizens of the 12 Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which, like the Kyrgyz Republic, were the republics that once comprised the Soviet Union. Between 1993 and 2011, the UGRAD program sent 176 students from the Kyrgyz Republic to attend community

colleges and four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. for one academic year. UGRAD is funded by the U.S. State Department, and, like all State Department funded exchange programs, has the broad objectives of developing personal, civic, academic, and professional skills which alumni can take back to their home country (U.S. Department of State, 2009). But another objective that is specific to UGRAD is to help the former Soviet republics in their transition from a communist past to a hopefully democratic, open-market present (International Research & Exchanges Board, 2009).

While these are laudable objectives for the U.S. government to invest in, the simple act of studying in a foreign country does not guarantee that learning, much less the transfer of skills from host country to home country, will occur (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Montrose, 2002; Che et al, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand the factors and conditions of the program, and understand how those influence the achievement program objectives.

Research Methods

This study employed a mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Creswell (2014) defines mixed methods research as an approach to inquiry that combines both quantitative and qualitative forms of research, involves philosophical assumptions from both forms, and mixes or integrates both approaches in a study. Elements of a retrospective tracer study (Bok & Bowen, 1998; Hornby & Symon, 1994; ILO, 2011; Paige et al., 2009; Pang, 1975) method were used. Retrospective tracer studies represent a systematic attempt to study and follow-up those who have experienced various training or educational experiences (Dejaeghere & Fry, 2003). Retrospective tracer studies are an inquiry approach at a single point in time that can generate data on

an already achieved impact (ILO, 2011).

The mixed methods approach used was explanatory sequential method, which has a prescribed, two-phase sequence (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative data were gathered and then analyzed in the first phase, followed by collection and analysis of the qualitative data in the second. This sequence allowed the researcher to sketch a good picture of the results with the quantitative data, then use the qualitative data to explain the general picture further through the use of rich descriptions (Creswell, 2014).

For this research project, the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic completed an online survey consisting of two parts. The first part ascertained information about each participant's exchange experience in order to determine whether or not elements known to promote the development of intercultural competence as part of a study abroad program were present. The second part of the survey then assessed the extent to which UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic have been successful in achieving the UGRAD program's stated objectives. The second part of the survey used an existing evaluation instrument previously used by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' Office of Policy and Evaluation to evaluate the outcomes of the UGRAD program by measuring alumni's beliefs, attitudes, and actions in relation to specific program objectives (Aguirre International, 2004). The data from the survey were then analyzed, and follow up in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with participants selected using a maximum variation sampling method. The interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how the factors of the Thematic Triad influence the achievement of program objectives.

Context of the Study

The Kyrgyz Republic became an independent, autonomous nation in 1991, following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Lacking an abundance of natural resources that its also newly independent neighbors Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan possess, political leaders during infancy of the Kyrgyz Republic's independence committed themselves to becoming the most democratic nation in Central Asia (Gleason, 2004). Sensing that their virtual lack of exportable natural resources would hinder their economic ability to survive independently in the global market economy, Kyrgyz leaders understood that the promise of democracy would bring the promise of support – financial and otherwise – from Western, democratic countries (Anderson, 1999).

While the Kyrgyz Republic did create the framework of a governmental structure that was far more democratic than their other Central Asian neighbors, it has fallen short of the ideal democratic standards of more economically developed nations (Kuchukeeva

Figure 1
Map of Kyrgyz Republic

Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/kyrgyzstan.html

& O'Loughlin, 2003). One major failing has been the tendency of its presidents, who were popularly elected into office, to routinely consolidate their power and increasingly use corrupt methods to maintain their positions and enhance their personal wealth (Huskey, 2010). According to the "Freedom in the World" report, "corruption is pervasive in Kyrgyzstani society. Despite multiple rounds of constitutional and statutory changes, the country has long been trapped in a cycle in which predatory political elites use government resources to reward clients—including organized crime figures—and punish opponents" (Freedom House, 2016). This is due, in large part, to the fact that, despite the façade of a stated commitment to democratic ideals, the people of Kyrgyz Republic, then and now, have no real notion of what it means to be a true democratic state (Heyneman, 2004). Further, without the understanding of what a democracy is and how it functions, the Kyrgyz government has largely been unable to create the necessary institutions that form the foundation of democratic societies (Anderson, Pomfret, & Usseinova, 2004). Examples of such institutions that necessarily underpin a democratic society are a free and independent judiciary, a free press, and a general adherence by the people and organizations to a rule of law. The development of such institutions have been lacking in the Kyrgyz Republic since its independence.

Because of the Kyrgyz government's early commitment to becoming a democratic nation, support has come from democratic nations like the United States (Anderson, 1999). One form of support is a commitment to international education exchange programs. Through the auspices of Freedom for Russian and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act (FSA) of 1992, international education exchange programs have been established to bring high school,

undergraduate, and graduate students from all former Soviet republics to study in the U.S. (Yazdani, 2007). The UGRAD program in Kyrgyz Republic, which will be studied here, is one example of an international education exchange program that was created as a result of the FSA. Sharing a similar mission as most other governmentally-funded exchange programs, UGRAD is designed to help the Kyrgyz Republic by contributing educated people to its economic and democratic reform process and by promoting mutual understanding among the people of both the U.S. and Kyrgyz Republic (Aguirre, 2003).

Attempts at establishing a democratic nation at the onset of independence resulted in some initial success, but the progress has not been sustained (Nichol, 2010). According Freedom House (2016), Kyrgyz Republic became an increasingly less democratic nation every year but one between 1997 and 2009. The only year that elements of democracy did not diminish in that timeframe was 2005, which happened to be the year Akayev was overthrown. But even then, the overall democracy score only improved from 5.67 to 5.64 (Freedom House, 2016). In fact, that minute gain in democratization was completely eradicated by 2009, when the Freedom House's designation for Kyrgyz Republic was downgraded from "Partly-Free," which it had been since 1997, to "Not Free" (Freedom House, 2016). The “Not Free” distinction lasted only one year, as the rating went back to “Partly-free” in 2010, and has remained so ever since.

Statement of Value Premises and Basic Assumptions

This research project was conducted with the assumption that there is both a value and benefit to international education exchange programs. I contend that such programs provide both a private and public good. Individuals who participate have the ability to

gain knowledge, experience, and social connections that can help them in their personal and professional lives, while participating organizations (governmental and non-governmental) are enriched with access to new ideas, economic markets, and social contacts. Being both a private and public good, I believe it to be in the best interest of the U.S. government to continue to broadly support and generously fund international education exchange programs.

However, research shows that participation alone in international exchange programs does not guarantee benefits (Stephenson, 2002; Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009; Skelly, 2009). It is essential for each and every program to be conducted, administered, and evaluated in such a way that maximum utility is achieved and the intended program objectives are met consistently. This is the spirit upon which this research project was conducted. Any instances of failure on the part of Kyrgyz Republic UGRAD alumni to meet program objectives found was not used as rationale for the elimination of such programs. Instead, the findings are used with an eye toward enhancing the administrative and programmatic aspects of the program to give program alumni the opportunity to capitalize on the knowledge and experience they have gained and help to ensure program objectives are met more often and more effectively.

Statement of Study Purpose and Guiding Research Question

The purpose of this study, then, is to determine which factors (i.e. personal, program, experiential, cultural) influence the achievement of program objectives for Kyrgyz Republic alumni of the U.S. governmentally sponsored UGRAD program.

Definitions of Key Terms

The development of intercultural competence is a key concept in this study. Intercultural is a term that has been used frequently and often as a synonym for international, cross-cultural, and global (Deardorff, 2004). But Bennett (2012) distinguish intercultural from the other terms by defining it as an interaction in which the cultural difference is central to the process of making meaning from the interaction. This is the context in which it is used here, since the focus is the interaction Kyrgyz Republic students with people in the U.S. while participating in the UGRAD program. In such an intercultural context, Spitzberg writes that competence is more than just ability to function and behave. It also implies appropriateness, which he defines as that which is deemed by others as legitimate or fitting for the context, and effective, meaning "the accomplishment of the valued goals or rewards relative to costs and alternatives" (p. 381, 2009). Borrowing from these and other scholars, the definition of intercultural competence used for this study is the ability to act appropriately and effectively when faced with cultural difference. Further, intercultural competence is largely the product of a person's capacity to shift cultural perspective, intercultural competence is gained through a developmental - often deliberate - process, and is integrated into a person's cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006; Hammer, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 1999; Paige, 1993; Paige, 2012; Spitzberg, 2009).

Intercultural competence is used in this study to describe an ideal outcome of all international education exchange, but more specifically, study abroad programs. Therefore, it is necessary to establish definitions for international education exchange and study abroad. Bachner and Zeutschel (2009) define international education exchange as

a sojourn into another cultural milieu, which is extensive in duration, and which involves intensive exposure to the other culture, its people, and its institutions. As an educational experience, the exchange is undertaken typically for purposes of formal study, language proficiency, skill development, personal development, increased knowledge of host country, or improved international understanding and relations. The exchange experience may be programmatic (organized) or individualized (independently arranged), and may occur across a range of educational levels. This definition provides a wide scope and it is inclusive of many different types of activities that can be labeled international education exchange. But the above definition is relatively vague in defining the duration of a sojourn, so the term could apply equally to experiences in which students go abroad for one-week as well as to those in which they go abroad to complete an entire four-year degree program abroad. The term study abroad, therefore, distinguishes itself from other types of international education exchange experiences in that it is an experience in which students complete part of their degree program through activities outside their home institution and country (Brzezinski, 2010). To be defined as a study abroad, students' international experiences must be at least three months in duration, which gives them ample time for significant cultural learning, and no longer than one year (Hoff, 2008; Martin, 1987). As such, study abroad programs are considered to be a distinct subset of international education exchange. The UGRAD program is defined here as a study abroad program as the exchange experience is part of the participants' higher education experience. UGRAD participants do not receive degrees from their U.S. institutions, only academic credit which may count towards their degree back in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Unfortunately, it was not practical to measure the development of intercultural

competence of the Kyrgyz Republic UGRAD alumni as part of this study. Even if it were feasible, the findings would not be applicable for this study because it is not possible to attribute alumni's current intercultural competencies directly to their exchange experience. Some alumni participated in the program nearly 25 years ago, therefore the intercultural competencies they possess now cannot be attributable to their participation in the program. In lieu of measuring the alumni's levels of intercultural competence, this study used the presence of the personal, programmatic, and experiential factors which are known to promote intercultural competence in a study abroad experience as a proxy for intercultural competence. In other words, if the factors and conditions known to promote the development of intercultural competence were present and experienced by the alumni, it was assumed that they either did develop intercultural competence or had the opportunity to. Skye Stephenson identifies a number of such factors which, when certain conditions and experiences are met, promote what she termed intercultural deepening in a study abroad setting (2002). The three areas which Stephenson identify as promoting opportunities for a sojourner to develop intercultural deepening, put in the context of this study, are:

1) Personal factors related to the UGRAD participant;

2) U.S. cultural characteristics and events, and the interaction with Kyrgyz republic culture;

3) UGRAD program and host university personnel (2002)

Stephenson refers to these three areas as the Thematic Triad (2002). The explanatory factors originally provided by Stephenson in each of the three themes were modified for use in this study to be inclusive of more recent research on the development of

intercultural competence through study abroad and experiential learning theory were used as independent variables in the research to help establish the proxy for intercultural competence.

This study contains many references to UGRAD program objectives. For the purposes of this study, the specific objectives used to measure attainment of program objectives are taken from an evaluation done for the U.S. Department of State (Aguirre, 2003). The program objectives are defined as:

1) A willingness and commitment on the part of the alumni to be agents of change in their home countries after participation;

2) Acquire an understanding of important elements of civil society and espouse those values at home;

3) Generate enduring ties with Americans from the program;

4) Improvement of the following skills:

a) Effective use of resources

b) Interpersonal skills

c) Use and dissemination of information skills

d) Ability to see interrelationships and a wider perspective

e) Use of technology (Aguirre, 2003)

Finally, the researcher was cognizant of how civil society is conceptualized differently in the Kyrgyz Republic and the United States, and endeavored to understand how the differing styles at home and in the U.S. affected the outcomes of UGRAD alumni. Civil society is defined here as an intermediate realm between the state and household of organized groups and associations that are separate and autonomous from

the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests, values or identities (Manor et al, 1999, p. 4). Civil society is known to be a foundational aspect of democratic societies, and a gene carrier for passing down values and virtues from one generation to the next (Edwards, 2004). However, the neo-liberal conception of civil society in Western democracies is different from the communal forms found in the former Soviet Union. Neo-liberal civil society often refers to the non-profit sector that is independent from the state but able to assume the role of provider of certain services (Earle, 2005). Also, in neo-liberal style of civil society, citizens are engaged free from state, family or community bonds, and participation cannot be imposed (Babajan, 2005). In contrast, communal civil society builds upon traditions of mutual aid, localized decision-making and is more concerned with the community and self-help than state relations (Babajan, 2005). Also, network ties in neo-liberal civil societies are weak, and membership is open and heterogeneous, while in communal style civil society ties are strong (e.g. familial) and membership is often closed (Gibson, 2001).

Study Limitations

At the heart of this study is the relationship between intercultural skills developed during an exchange program participants and their success (or lack of) in achieving program objectives. Therefore, it may have been useful to utilize a reliable, validated research instrument, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Hammer, 2012; Paige et al, 2003). The use of such an instrument could quantify levels of intercultural competence for the alumni and, if administered with a pre- and post-test design, would pinpoint exactly how much development occurred as a result of participation in the exchange program. These results

could then be compared to program outcomes to analyze a correlation between the two. But it is my desire to include the entire group of participants from the UGRAD program in the Kyrgyz Republic in order to understand how the participants and the program are doing as a whole. If I were to administer the IDI now to an alumnus who participated in the program 25 years ago, it would not be possible to attribute that person's intercultural development only to their UGRAD experience. With so much time having elapsed since their experience in the U.S. as part of the UGRAD program, alumni will likely have had several other opportunities to strengthen their intercultural abilities. This project, then, as designed, used static elements of their program participation, or information that has not changed since their participation. In using the adapted Thematic Triad as a proxy for intercultural competence in analyzing their study abroad experience, it is not necessary to actually quantify the alumni's intercultural development. Instead, this study examined whether or not alumni were given, as part of the program, what are know to be the foundational conditions which can contribute to development of intercultural competence.

Also, a very informative and useful study would have been a comparison of how the alumni's actions and behaviors in regards to the program's objectives compare with others from the Kyrgyz Republic who did not have an opportunity to participate in an international education exchange program. Unfortunately, due to language limitations and insufficient access to the general population, it was beyond the ability of the researcher to conduct such a study. As such, the findings of this study are not generalizable to the entire population of the Kyrgyz Republic and are not be helpful in explaining more fully the democratic experience there.

Also, one of the ways the U.S. government tries to dissuade program participants from using the program as a "ticket out" is through the implementation of a two-year home-country residence requirement (U.S. Department of State, 2011). To facilitate program participants' transfer of skills and knowledge back to their home country, this rule mandates that they spend at least two years back in their home country before they are allowed to obtain another U.S. visa. As with many immigration rules, intelligent and motivated people can find ways around it. With this in mind, this research was conducted confidentially so the research participants will, in no way, be subject to any ramifications or punitive measures as a result of their circumvention of U.S. immigration laws and policy. Program alumni who did not comply with two-year home-country residency requirement or other immigration laws were reluctant to participate in the research, but by ensuring their confidentiality, I was able to enlist some to participate.

Also, a sort of response bias may be present as the data will be collected from participants in the Kyrgyz Republic (and other places around the world where the alumni may be) for the researcher who is in the United States. As the UGRAD program alumni were asked to respond to an online survey, those who live in rural and remote place with limited access to internet are likely to be underrepresented in the study. Further, the data collected are self-reported, retrospective reflections of the UGRAD program alumni. In most cases, it was not possible to validate the veracity of their responses.

And finally, due to a relative scarcity of research examining the post-participation experiences of international students who studied abroad in the United States, the theoretical underpinnings of this study are based largely on a body of literature that focuses exclusively on the experience of U.S. study abroad participants. While there are

numerous commonalities between the intercultural exchange experiences of all sojourners, an effort has been made in this study to control for how the experience of a sojourner from the Kyrgyz Republic may differ from the Westerner's experiences, as derived from the literature.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This research sought to determine the factors that influence Kyrgyz Republic alumni of the U.S. governmentally funded Global Undergraduate Exchange Program for Eurasia and Central Asia (UGRAD) in their achievement of the program's stated objectives. This chapter is a review of scholarly literature relevant to the study, and will focus on the following topics, concepts, and theories in order to construct an adequate lens through which to view the Kyrgyz Republic UGRAD program and its alumni:

1. A brief history of international education;
2. Important legislation facilitating international educational exchange;
3. Development of intercultural competence through study abroad;
4. Research on the development of intercultural competence in international education exchange and study abroad.
5. The Kyrgyz Republic/UGRAD context.

Brief History of International Education

The term "international education" can include a wide range of activities in any number of forums. Harari (1972) writes that international education encompasses three major strands: an internationalization of curriculum, the international movement of students and scholars involved in training and research, and engagements of U.S. education abroad in technical and educational programs. Deutsch (1970) calls international education any, or all, of the collective "efforts to educate persons through actual experience in other countries or through education at home geared to super-national or other culture frameworks" (p. 1). For the purpose of this research, the term international education refers to the practice of leaving one's own country to gain

knowledge and experience in or from another, through either formal or informal programs. This section of the literature review will focus primarily on the experiences of people from other countries coming to the U.S for formal educational experiences in institutions of higher education.

While the reasons people engage in international education vary, the general purpose has largely remained consistent throughout history. International education is said to increase a participant's knowledge of the arts and sciences, in addition to increasing their understanding of themselves and the national and world societies in which they live (Johnson & Colligan, 1965). The practice dates back at least to 388 BCE, when scores of cross-national scholars flocked to Athens to study under Plato and Aristotle (Brickman, 1964; Lakshmana Rao, 1979). The practice of international education continues across the globe today at an historically high level, with each successive year producing record numbers of scholars travelling abroad for educational programs (IIE, 2016).

It was the ability to attract international students that led to the emergence of a "university" as the main source of higher learning (Brawner, Bevis, & Lucas, 2007). Prior to the 11th century, most formal education was administered in municipal, or local, cathedral church schools (Brawner, Bevis, & Lucas, 2007). For a local school to grow and attain university status - meaning an institution that features a variety of different faculties and colleges - it was necessary to attract people from outside of its own local domain. These earliest incarnations of the modern-day university model occurred in Western European countries like Italy, Spain, France, and England (Brawner, Bevis & Lucas, 2007). And up until the 20th century, the institutions of higher education in those

countries were the most prestigious in the world (Cieslak, 1955; Brawner, Bevis, & Lucas, 2007). Thus, the countries in western Europe were the primary destinations of educational based sojourners from the 11th to the 20th century (Thomson & Laves, 1963; Brickman, 1964).

But as the United States emerged from the aftermath of its Civil War, an effort was made to solidify the U.S. image in the world and to improve its institutions of higher learning and create new ones (Cieslak, 1955). Prior to the Civil War, the U.S. higher education sector had no real ability to attract international scholars. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did any sizeable numbers of international students begin to enroll in U.S. universities (Brawner, Bevis, & Lucas, 2007). The first groups were largely from just a few different countries - mainly India and China - and not until the late 19th century did international student enrollments begin to diversify (Cieslak, 1955).

In the late 19th century, those involved in institutions of higher education in the United States began to recognize the value of enrolling international students, as it was deemed to the add prestige to the institution and the value of the concept of diversity of thought was accepted (Johnson & Colligan, 1965). This recognition, coupled with "shriveling" of the world due to technological advancements that made communication easier and transportation less cumbersome, paved the way for the "institutionalization" of international education in the United States (Speakman, 1966). Speakman (1966) writes that prior to the late 19th century, international education occurred, but it was primarily done in an unorganized manner. But in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the unique needs of the people and institutions engaging in international education programs were recognized, and policies and programs were created to support them. With international

students' needs more fulfilled, and institution's increased ability to facilitate these students, the practice of international education grew (Speakman, 1966).

U.S. Governmental Involvement in International Education

While the vast majority of students involved in international education were (and continue to be) self-supporting (IIE, 2016), the creation of scholarship programs increased opportunities to study abroad. With a semblance of an institutionalized structure for international education in place in the opening decades of the 20th century, the road was paved for the creation of sponsored programs, mostly private at first, that would boost both the incidences of international student mobility, as well as the prestige and importance of the practice (DuBois, 1956; Thomson & Laves, 1963; Johnson & Colligan, 1965). The Rhodes Fund was established in 1902 to fund exchanges for U.S., German, and British scholars (Speakman, 1966). The Rhodes Fund is said to be the first private foundation established for the express purpose of promoting understanding mutual understanding and goodwill through students (Scanlon, 1960). Additionally, organizations like the American Scandinavian Foundation, the Belgian American Foundation, and the World Peace Foundation were created to fund international education opportunities (Speakman, 1966). Philanthropic foundations such as the Carnegie Endowment and Rockefeller Foundation also established programs designed primarily to deepen international understanding that supported international student mobility (Speakman, 1966). These early private programs were quite competitive and selected the best and brightest participants often from a deep pool of applicants; therefore, the perception of the intellectual abilities of international students, as well as

the understanding of the value they bring to U.S. institutions, rose (Lakshmana Rao, 1979).

Eventually, the support for exchange programs spread from the private sector to the public. One of the first examples of a publicly funded international student exchange program, and one that would serve as a model for the programs that would follow, was the Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Fund (Brickman, 1964; Schuster, 1968; Arndt, 2005). Theodore Roosevelt suggested in 1909 that the United States put a portion of the monetary reparations due to them from China as a result of the Boxer Rebellion into a scholarship fund that would allow Chinese students to come to the U.S. to study (Speakman, 1966). Roosevelt thought that by promoting "the coming of Chinese students to this country and making it attractive to them to take courses at our universities and higher education institutions," the U.S. could help China become a modern country (Brickman, 1964, p. 35). This model of using reparations and other debts from foreign countries to fund international educational exchange opportunities served as the basis for the Fulbright Commission, which, to this day, is arguably the best known and most respected publicly funded international education exchange programs, having provided over 152,000 international educational opportunities in the U.S. (Fulbright, 2010).

While international student enrollments in the U.S. grew steadily from 1930 to 1940, the numbers exploded in the U.S. following World War II (IIE, 2016). From 1945 to 1954, total international student enrollments in the U.S. increased by over 400% (IIE, 2016). One of the numerous factors contributing this rise was the belief that increased cultural understanding through international educational exchange among the people of the world would be a viable safeguard from future devastating wars (Johnson & Colligan,

1965). Speakman (1966) writes that following the two world wars, people in the United States were more familiar with and had more personal contact with people from different countries and cultures around the world than any other time up to that point (Speakman, 1966). This exposure led to an increase in the study of foreign languages and the creation of international and area studies academic programs in U.S. universities. These factors fueled a proliferation of international student enrollments in U.S. universities and an interest in people from the U.S. in places abroad in the late 20th century (Lakhshmana Rao, 1979).

Joseph Mestenhauser (1997) characterizes U.S. involvement in international education in the 20th century in four distinct phases. First, was what he called the "euphoria" phase, which lasted from roughly 1936 until the Vietnam War era. The euphoria phase was characterized by the belief that knowledge about other people and places in the world would prevent future wars. Euphoria was followed by what Mestenhauser (1997) called the "darkening clouds" era, which lasted from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s. The darkening clouds era was characterized by a diminution of resources allocated to international education and exchange, due largely to the conflict in Vietnam. After the darkening clouds parted, a new era called "power-politics" emerged during the successive Reagan and Bush administrations (Mestenhauser, 1997). This era was borne out of the decline of the Soviet Union and the race for political influence in the new multi-polar world. The final phase identified by Mestenhauser is called "economic competitiveness" (1997). This phase is characterized by the effects of globalization, in which people, capital, and ideas flow freely across the globe due to enhanced communication and transportation technology, and where wealth and economic

opportunities are being more concentrated in the hands of multinational corporations than in governments.

Cultural Relations Theory

At the heart of the promotion of international education exchange programs by the U.S. government was an emphasis on cultural relations as an effective foreign policy tool (Brickman, 1964). It was believed that "America's security depended on its ability to speak to and win the support of people in other countries" (Pells, 1997, p. 33). The U.S. entry into cultural relations programs in the 1930s was deemed necessary in order to counterbalance the communist and fascist nations' use of foreign language radio broadcast and film as a means of promoting favorable images to foreign audiences (Scanlon, 1960; Laves, 1961; Nye, 2008). Scanlon (1960) writes that "the cold war, the desire for new countries to have their societies known abroad, and the development of new techniques in the mass media have all contributed to the expansion of government cultural relations programs" (p.20). And finally, the promotion and adherence to the value of cultural programs following World War II stemmed from the belief that wars are created in the minds of men, therefore a better understanding of the tensions that prevent international understanding would allow for the effective management of future conflicts (Snow, 2008).

Thomson and Laves (1963) give three reasons why the U.S. government became increasingly involved in cultural relations programs, especially through international education. The first reason was to facilitate the continued growth of science and technology. As distant communication was becoming more immediate with the telephone and telegraph, so too was face-to-face communication with advances in

transportation. These advances also facilitated the "slower and deeper currents of communication" (pg. 32), such as the movement of students, teachers, and scholars (Thomson & Laves, 1963). Second, the spread of democracy enhanced the importance of common people everywhere (Thomson & Laves, 1963). Governmental officials were seeking the input and approval of their citizens more than ever, so it was deemed increasingly important for everyday citizens from around the world to have favorable impressions of the United States, and that could be accomplished by giving them educational opportunities in the U.S. (Thomson & Laves, 1963). And third, the rapid growth of international economic ties created through investment and trade made it necessary for people to be more aware of the conditions in other countries (Thomson & Laves, 1963). Bringing international students in to interact in U.S. college classrooms was thought to be a way to gain this insight.

Deutsche (1970) wrote of other justifications for increased governmental involvement in cultural relations programs like educational exchange. He wrote that governmental support for and participation in such programs contributes to United States foreign policy objectives in the following ways: first, they strengthen the relationships between the people and governments of Western nations; second, they increase the number and depth of peaceful and mutually beneficial relationships with (then) Communist countries; third, they improve U.S. economic welfare in the context of the global economy by opening up new global markets and establishing new trading partners; fourth, they promote the development of productive economies and democratic institutions in new countries; and finally, they serve to strengthen the procedures of international cooperation Deutsche (1970).

While Thomson, Laves, and Deutsche supply a broad rationale for the promotion of cultural relations programs that could be used for the benefit across different governmental and societal sectors, George Shuster provides a cultural relations theory that explains why such programs are particularly effective in the domain of higher education. Shuster's theory is based on the assumption that "at the present stage of human stage of human history a developed national society tends for the sake of its own stability and welfare to take on an international dimension" (1968, p. 24). For Shuster, international dimension refers to interactions between countries and regions that permit the free flow of cultural goods. Cultural goods, to Shuster, are the:

> accretions of information, inquiry and creative artistic achievements.... Intellectually considered, they may conveniently be summarized as the accumulation of knowledge and method which the human mind has built up round those fundamental, reality-revealing intuitions which in their totality form the present outlook of mankind. (pg. 25, 1968)

Shuster argues that because of the inherent intellectual and academic properties, the flow of cultural goods is primarily the concern of the universities, "either directly or through the lower schools and instrumentalities of mass education and public opinion" (pg. 36, 1968). Shuster's theory serves to justify the promotion of international education exchange programs in and for institutions of higher education.

Important Legislation Facilitating International Educational Exchange

The era immediately preceding World War II is viewed as the formal entry of U.S. governmental involvement in international education, though enabling legislation was not enacted until after the war (Laves, 1961; Davis, 1964; Cieslak, 1955; Espinosa,

1976). Leading the charge to include cultural relations programs as official foreign policy tool was U.S. Senator William Fulbright. Fulbright saw international exchange as something that could enrich not just the individual, but the state too. As an endeavor that benefits the public sphere, it follows that international exchange should be sponsored in some way by the government. Fulbright also articulated what he saw as the three main objectives of international education exchange programs (1965). First, international exchange programs should acquaint students and scholars with the world as it is. He says that these programs should have "everything to do with the cultivation of ideas and values and little to do with fostering images" (Johnson & Colligan, 1965, p. viii). This objective speaks to the ability to create critical thinking skills in individual participants of international education exchange by enabling them to differentiate between propaganda and real conditions of a nation and its people. Second, programs should make the benefits of U.S. culture and technology accessible to the world and to enrich American life by exposing it to the culture, art, and science of other countries (Johnson & Colligan, 1965, p. viii). And third, international exchanges should bring more knowledge, compassion, and reason into world affairs in the hopes that individuals and nations will learn to live in peace and friendship (Johnson & Colligan, 1965, p. viii). In looking at Fulbright's objectives, it is clear that he saw both personal and national benefits to international educational exchange.

Fulbright Act, 1946

It was with the aforementioned objectives in mind that the Fulbright program came into being. Created with the passage of the landmark Fulbright Act of 1946, the program used funds made available through the renegotiation of European war debts due

to the U.S. to provide exchange opportunities for students and scholars of the U.S. and foreign countries (Vestal, 1994). Fulbright conceived the program because he thought that "if large numbers of people know and understand the people from nations other than their own, they may develop a capacity for empathy, a distaste for killing other men, and an inclination to peace" (Vestal, 1994, p. 22). Fulbright would later elaborate on his theme of empathy and how participants in international education exchange programs develop it:

> they bring to their communities an understanding of other countries, their customs, religions, and history and are thereby capable of sound judgment in making decisions affecting the relationship of their respective countries with other countries with different traditions and cultures. In this era of strife and violence, people who are capable of understanding and of mitigating the passions that arise from the conflict of ideological convictions are essential if the community of nations is to find a way to adjust to the reality of the age of nuclear weapons. (Bennett Woods, 1987, p. 10)

At the time of the program's creation, Bennett Woods wrote that Fulbright was disillusioned with America's diplomatic leadership, which tended to be supportive of isolationist and economically nationalist policies (1987). Fulbright felt that only through "collective security and economic interdependency could the endless cycle of aggression and war be broken" (Bennett Woods, 1987, p. 23). Thus, Fulbright believed the notion of national sovereignty to be detrimental to the well being of the people and nations of the world, and that an international exchange program would be an effective method of counteracting it by "raising up an educated, sophisticated elite capable of guiding the

nation and the world" (Bennett Woods, 1987, p. 22).

The Fulbright program came about as the U.S. emerged from World War II as one of the most powerful nations in the world. The Fulbright program served to project a new vision of the U.S. to the rest of the world, one that it afforded its citizens an opportunity to gain insight into other cultures, while recognizing that it is in the best national interests to have people from other countries understand it (Johnson & Colligan, 1965). The Fulbright program differed from other international scholarships in that it was the first exchange program to have a truly global focus (BFS, 1966). Previously, most programs were bi-national or regional in nature and they involved only small numbers of participants. Fulbright, on the other hand, immediately involved 22 different countries and had more available funds than any other program (BFS, 1966). Second, the administration of the program was unique. Though directly administered by the U.S. governmental organizations, the Fulbright Act mandated the creation of the Foreign Scholarship Board that would oversee the program and ensure that the program would remain educational in nature and not political (BFS, 1966). Third, the Fulbright awards were given on a purely meritorious basis (BFS, 1966). In keeping with program objective of increased mutual cultural understanding, merit was based equally on the person's academic and professional standing and their "ability to act as a responsible mature exemplar of his country" (BFS, 1966, p. 4). And finally, it was unique in that it did not initially involve the expenditure of U.S. currency (Cieslak, 1955). The idea behind the program was surplus war property abroad would be "sold to X country, which would pay in its own currency. The funds would remain in X, and be used to pay the

tuition, books, and living expenses of American students who wish to study there" (Coffin, 1966, p. 85).

Actual student and scholar mobility as a result of the Fulbright program began in 1948, with the primary activities being the individual exchange of students, teachers, research scholars, and lecturers. According to the Foreign Scholarship Board Report (1966), close to 2,000 people from 22 different countries participated in that first year. The number of Fulbright participants more than tripled by 1960.

In 1963, the first comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Fulbright program for international grantees was performed (IECA, 1963). The findings of the evaluation suggested the program was meeting the desired objectives. It found that participation in the program increased international understanding, it dispelled bad misconceptions and stereotypes about American people, and that it had established channels of communication between people of the other countries and the U.S. (IECA, 1963). The findings of this evaluation solidified that concept of international education exchange as an important component of U.S. foreign policy, and it justified further expansion of the Fulbright and other international education exchange programs.

Mutual Cultural and Educational Exchanges Act, 1961 (Fulbright-Hays Act)

Prior to 1961, several important legislative pieces were in place to establish on a formal basis international educational exchange as an accepted piece of U.S. foreign policy, but more had to be done. In *Toward a National Effort in International Education and Cultural Affairs* (1961), a report submitted at the request of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Educational Exchange, Thomas Laves describes the problems with educational exchange legislation as it was up to 1961. He wrote:

> what the government does now in educational and cultural cooperation is essentially a patchwork of activities developed under the impetus of many separate initiatives and financed from a variety of appropriations. It is carried out by a multiplicity of agencies lacking in sufficiently purposeful coordination of policy, program planning, and administration... Our educational and cultural activities enjoy a low priority in the administration of our foreign relations (1961, p. 6).

As a result, Laves (1961) wrote:

> long-range commitments cannot be made, although they are necessary for developing educational and cultural cooperation. Financial support is inadequate, both in global program terms and in terms of individual activities. Relationships between the governmental and private sectors, though rapidly developing, are not yet such as to achieve maximum productivity in the national effort. Finally, what we do seems often to be inadequately related, bilaterally or through international organizations, to the efforts of other governments and thus seems to lose the advantages which reciprocity and mutuality can contribute (p. 6).

Much of what Laves wrote in the report would eventually became the foundation for provisions in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (MECEA), also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act.

Prior to the passage of the MECEA, several experts in field of international education testified before the Committee on Foreign Relations about the need for this legislation. Their testimonies often mirrored what Laves had reported. University of

Pennsylvania President Gaylord P. Harnell testified "those who are expert in Federal legislation can probably keep the various provisions of different laws that govern international educational exchanges...This however, is not shared by the amateur such as those persons actually engaged in the act of education" (Hearings on the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchanges Act, 1961, p. 12). Gaylord was referring to the several different pieces of legislation that made provisions for international education exchange, including those previously referred to here, and the tendency for the provisions in those acts to be unfocused in relation to U.S. foreign policy objectives and sometimes overlapping in scope. James Davis concurred, testifying that existing legislation had "problems of fragmentation, rigidity, and lack of continuity" (Hearings on the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchanges Act, 1961, p. 50).

Once passed, the MECEA became the "basic charter for all U.S. government-sponsored educational and cultural exchanges. It is the most comprehensive of all congressional actions, consolidating all previous laws and adding new features that strengthened the program" (Board of Foreign Scholarships, 1971). While the Act was broad in scope and enhanced and enabled many different aspects in the practice of international education, the provisions examined here are the ones that relate strictly to governmental sponsorship of international students in the U.S.

First, the MECEA established a Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (BECA) in the Department of State which is the organization that would become "responsible for managing coordinating, and overseeing" (MECEA, 2011, Section 2460.a) the myriad of educational exchange programs pursuant to the Act. By law, the Bureau was and is to be led by the Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural

Affairs, and that person is "regarded by the President as a principal shepherd responsible for exercising primary leadership in persuading members of the flock to move in more or less consistent directions" (Davis, 1964, p. 213). Second, it addressed limitations relating to legislative financing issues by creating a no-year appropriations schedule for exchange programs, which meant that appropriated funds could be used until spent, as opposed to following the strict fiscal year calendar. Also, it made federal funds available for international students "orientation courses, language training, and other appropriate services…to increase the effectiveness of such programs following the return of such [participants] to the countries of their residence" (Department of State, 1963, p.70). Thus, the importance of cultural learning strategies on the part of the sojourner were recognized and validated. And third, the MECEA addressed the concept of "brain-drain", which is the "siphoning off" of highly skilled and highly educated workers from the economically developing countries that need (Shuster, 1968, p. 43). The MECEA implemented the two-year home residency requirement to insure that governmentally sponsored exchange programs were not complicit in promoting bran-drain. The two year home residency requirement mandated that anyone participating in governmentally sponsored programs could not apply for an immigrant or nonimmigrant visa, nor permanent residence to the United States until at least two years after the completion of their sponsored program.

And finally, the MECEA established the United States Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs (Department of State, 1963). The Commission's first charge was to conduct a study on "the effectiveness of past programs with an emphasis on the activities of a reasonably representative cross section of past

recipients of aid" (Department of State, 1963, p.71). The resulting report, *A Beacon of Hope* (U.S. Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs, 1963), focused primarily on the outcomes of international grantees, as members of government were keen to quantify in some way the outcomes of funding international students in the U.S. The report, in essence, served to validate that inherent value in international exchange as a foreign relations tool. To quote:

> we believe that the Congress and the American people can feel pride and deep satisfaction that the exchange program they conceived has proved so effective to their purposes. As it has developed in the course of these years, it has established itself as a basic ingredient of the foreign relations of the United States. There is no other international activity of our government that enjoys so much spontaneous public approval, elicits such extensive citizen participation, and yields such impressive evidences of success. In a time when most international activities seem almost unbearably complex and obscure in outcome, the success of educational exchange is a beacon of hope (U.S. Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs, 1963, 1963, p. 61).

The first five years after the passage of the MECEA was part of the era that Mestnhauser referred to as the "euphoria" period (1997). And as the U.S. became increasingly committed militarily to the conflict in Vietnam, resources for funding international exchange endeavors became more scarce (Deutsche, 1970; Vestal, 1994; Spaulding, Mauch, & Lin, 2001), thus precipitating Mestenhauser's "clouds darkening" phase. While international enrollments in the U.S. continued to rise during this period, the number of participants of governmentally funded programs declined (IIE, 2014).

Merkx (2010) writes that the legislative moves to increase the number of participants involved in the various aspects of governmentally funded international education exchange served to "broaden the base" of those around the world with international understanding and intercultural competence (p. 24). Subsequent reauthorizations of MECEA added new provisions that grant the authority to establish programs that are designed to assist specific countries in transition from totalitarianism to democracy (MECEA, 2011). Merkx (2010) called this "sharpening the point" of the legislation, by using the law to grant people from around the world the opportunity to gain expertise in specific fields to address specific world issues (p. 27). This sharpening of the law to create programs for countries that were hopefully transitioning to democracies was indicative of the soon to be post-Cold war era and the milieu of Mestenhauser's "power politics" phase (1997). It is also brings us to the final piece of legislation that is germane to this study.

FREEDOM Support Act of 1992

The final piece of legislation examined here is the Freedom for Russia and Eurasian Emerging Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act (FSA) of 1992. It was under the auspices of the FSA that the UGRAD program began. When the Soviet Union officially collapsed in 1991, all 15 former Soviet republics became independent, sovereign nations (Heyneman, 2004). The rationale for the FSA was based on the following findings supplied by congressional research:

1) With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was an historic opportunity to help the newly independent states transition into stable, peaceful, and democratic states;

2) All nations of the world had an interest in the success of these nations' transitions and it was necessary for the U.S. to contribute the support and expertise necessary for economic and political progress in these new nations;

3) The U.S., at the time, was particularly well positioned to make important contributions because it could build on existing cooperative programs (e.g. educational exchange programs) to assist in the development of democratic institutions; and

4) The collapse of the Soviet Union signaled the end of the Cold War, which meant the U.S. could possibly save a substantial amount of money due to the end of the race to build a military superior to the Soviet Union's. If the U.S. could not take advantage of the circumstances and act on the ability to influence the newly independent states, national security interests could be threatened and the opportunities to save would be greatly diminished. (FSA, 1992)

These are just of a few of the many rationales Congress provided for the creation of the bill, but they are the ones particularly relevant to the creation of programs that promoted international education exchange. FSA was written to provide assistance to the newly independent states, especially in the following areas: humanitarian needs, establishment of a democratic and free society, the creation and development of free enterprise/free market systems, the promotion of free trade and investment, broad-based educational reform (FREEDOM Support Act, 1992).

The FSA was a broadly conceived piece of legislation that aimed to address multiple areas of need for the people and the governments of both the U.S. and the newly independent states, and international educational exchange programs were seen as an effective way to address the various ambitions. Two of the immediate programs that were created under the auspices of the FSA were the Edmond S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program and the Undergraduate Exchange Program (now known as UGRAD) (IREX, 2011). The Muskie Fellowship provides college graduates from newly independent states an opportunity to come to the U.S. to earn Master's degrees in the hope that they will return to their home countries to make significant contributions to the thirteen areas the FSA hopes to address. IREX (2011) writes that Muskie Fellows study in academic fields that are typically not studied in their home countries; the specific fields listed on the IREX website are public health, environmental policy, and human rights law, which one can see, correlate nicely with the thirteen areas of need the FSA was created to address.

The other educational exchange program created immediately under the auspices of the FSA is the UGRAD program. The UGRAD program differs from the Muskie in two important ways - 1) it is for currently enrolled university students in the newly independent states, and 2) it is a study abroad program in which UGRAD participants do not receive a degree from a U.S. institution. With these limitations, the UGRAD program does not have the capability of adequately addressing all areas of need in the FREEDOM Support Act, so its objectives are to educate people from NIS countries on ideas of democracy and free market/free enterprise in the hopes they will go home and serve as proponents for these ideals. UGRAD students are expected to gain this knowledge

through one year of college level coursework, mandatory community service projects, and part-time internships (IREX, 2011).

As can be seen from this review of relevant U.S. legislation, there is a broad base of support for governmental sponsorship of international education exchange programs. The outcomes of exchange programs are believed to produce tangible benefits to the participating individuals, communities, organizations, and nations. But it is necessary to explore exactly what and how an individual learns through these experiences and how that learning enables the exchange participants and hosts to achieve the set objectives of the exchange programs. The next section will be an examination of the literature on the individual outcomes that ideally result from participation in international exchange.

Intercultural Competence Through Study Abroad

International education exchange programs sponsored by the U.S. government under the purview of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (BECA) all have at least two objectives. The first is to promote mutual cultural understanding between the U.S. and other participating countries (BECA, 2007). This specific objective is common to all BECA exchanges and is explicitly stated as a desired outcome of each individual program (BECA, 2007). Therefore, it is assumed that in order for a program participant to meet the objective of promoting mutual cultural understanding, that person must be able to know and understand both their home and host culture and be willing to serve as an intermediary between the two. The achievement of this objective, then, depends on the participant's ability to think, act, and behave appropriately and effectively in both their home and host cultures. In other words, they must be interculturally competent.

In addition to the promotion of mutual cultural understanding, BECA exchanges program have other explicitly stated goal, which are often more technical in nature. For the UGRAD program, the secondary goal is "to contribute to economic and democratic reform and development in the independent states of the former Soviet Union" (Aguirre International, 2003, p. 1; IREX, 2011). While there is a considerable body of literature on how and why international educational exchange program participants develop cultural competence, little is known about the congruity of these two important, yet dissimilar, goals. This study aims to address that gap by examining the extent to which the two goals of the UGRAD program are congruous.

Intercultural Competence Defined

It is assumed in this study that UGRAD participants must be able to act effectively and appropriately within the context of both their home and host cultures in order to be able to meet the program's main objective of being an instrument for the promotion of mutual understanding. The term *intercultural competence* will be used when referring to the personal growth and development that are a desired outcome of a UGRAD program participant's international education exchange experience. Since this study is specific to the context of the UGRAD program alumni from Kyrgyz Republic, the way in which intercultural competence is defined here will incorporate the specific elements and components that are germane to their experience. Thus, intercultural competence will be defined for this study as the ability to act and communicate appropriately and effectively when faced with cultural difference. Further, intercultural competence is largely the product of a person's capacity to shift cultural perspective, intercultural competence is gained through a developmental - often deliberate - process,

and is integrated into a person's cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains (J. Bennett, 2008; J. Bennett, 2015; M. Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006; Hammer, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 1999; Paige, 1993; Paige, 2012; Pusch & Merrill, 2008; Spitzberg, 2009; Stephenson, 2003). This following section will review the literature that deals with intercultural competence as it has been defined here.

Research indicates that the simple act of participating in an international educational exchange is no guarantee that intercultural competence will result (Bachner, 2004; Braskamp, 2008; Che et al, 2009; Hess, 1994; Kauffman et al, 1992; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Montrose, 2002; Paige & Goode, 2009; Stephenson, 2002; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009). Instead, the development of intercultural competence requires the sojourner to engage in an intentional, evolving, deliberative process (Bennett, 1993; Hammer, 2009; Kauffmann et al, 1993; Paige, 1993). That which is defined here as intercultural competence has been given many names, including cosmopolitanism, intercultural learning, cultural deepening, cultural intelligence, and others things (Table 1). Though these terms are all similar in some ways, they are not synonymous. Each term features different nuances of the same phenomenon.

Intercultural is used as the preferred descriptive term here, as opposed to often-synonymous descriptors like cross-cultural, global, and international. Asante and Gudykunst (as cited in Emert, 2008) make the distinction: "Cross-cultural research involves the comparative study in multiple cultures, whereas intercultural research involves the study of people from differing cultures who are interacting together" (p. 11). Milton Bennett (2012) makes a distinction by writing that cross-cultural refers to contact

Table 1
Variations on Intercultural Competence

Term	Characteristics	Select scholars
Cosmopolitanism	• Originally from Greek meaning "world citizen" • A moral worldliness and inclusivity used as an alternative to nationalism • A distinct form that must be understood in the context of modern day globalization	Appiah, 2006; Sobre-Denton & Bardhan, 2013; Sobre-Denton, 2015
Cultural/intercultural learning	Five dimension of cultural learning: • Learning about self as a cultural being • Learning about elements of culture • Culture specific learning • Culture general learning • Learning about learning	Paige, 2015; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi & Lassegard, 2002; Paige & Goode 2009
Cultural deepening	The ability of an individual to cognitively shift their cultural frame of reference in relation to cross-cultural encounters	Stephenson, 2002
Cultural intelligence (CQ)	• The capability of functioning effectively in culturally diverse settings • Four main factors: o Metacognitive CQ – the mental capacity to acquire and understand new cultural knowledge o Cognitive CQ – general knowledge and knowledge of cultural frameworks o Motivational CQ – Capacity to invest energy in cultural learning o Behavioral CQ – Capacity to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions in culturally diverse setting	Asser & Langbein-Park, 2015; Earley & Ang, 2003; Livermoore, 2010; Peterson, 2004; Thomas & Inkson, 2010

Table 1
Variations on Intercultural Competence (cont.)

Term	Characteristics	Select scholars
Global learning	• Refers to the educational engagement in the ongoing expansion of educational systems as a result of globalization. • An educational practice that focuses on the intersection of curriculum with international/global/intercultural values, attitudes, and skills. • A pedagogy encompassing the widening horizon for educational goals, global perspective for curricular content, and a response to the global scope of the individual in society.	Andreotti, 2008; Ashwill & Hoang Oanh, 2009; Guilherme, 2015; Hovland, 2006; Musil, 2006
Intercultural/cross-cultural communication	• Begins with the assumption that all communication is, in part, a cultural expression. • Intercultural communication is what transpires when communicate with others whose histories, assumptions, process of sense-making, and behaviors are different. • Concerned primarily with elements of subjective culture	Condon, 2015; Gallois, 2015; Lustig & Koester, 2012; Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2010; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2011
Intercultural sensitivity	• An individual's orientation towards cultural difference. • As originally conceived, 6 developmental orientations, each successive one represents a more sophisticated understanding of cultural difference. • First three orientations represent an ethnocentric mindset; the second three indicate an ethnorelative mindset • The stages, in developmental order, are Denial, Defense/reversal, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration	Bennett, M.J., 1993; Hammer, 2012; Paige, R.M. & Bennett, J., 2015

among people in which the people are from two or more different cultures; intercultural, on the other hand, is interaction between people in which the differences in culture are central to the creation of meaning from the interaction. Thus, "intercultural" is now a favored term for use by many (Koester, Wiseman, & Sanders 1993; Lustig & Koester, 1993) when describing "the totality of intercultural skills, behaviors, and attitudes that combine to make an individual successful and effective in intercultural interaction" (Emert, 2008, pg. 11). Kim and Ruben (1992) note that intercultural is a preferable term because it is not bound by any specific cultural attributes, such as like national or ethnic identities. As this description parallels the UGRAD participants' experience, intercultural will be the term used here.

While definitional differences and nuances exist between the various terms previously listed, they are often used synonymously when referring to the desired outcome of a person's experiences in dealing with cultural difference as part of an international exchange experience (Deardorff, 2004; Emert, 2008; Hoff, 2008; Skelly, 2009). Richard Lambert (1994) posits that a reason for the lack of consensus on definitive label for the cultural learning that takes place in an exchange or study abroad program is because the process is unique for each individual participant. There are different variables each participant brings to their exchange experience that makes the educational process different for each individual. Engle and Engle explain the “desired and real outcomes are as individual as the students themselves, each with her or his unique life tale, motivation, and imagined future” (2003, p. 5).

Darla Deardorff (2006) conducted a study to see if the eminent intercultural scholars and administrators of international exchange programs could come to a

consensus on, among other things, how intercultural competence should be defined as it pertains to international education exchange. While she found no disagreement among the scholars and administrators on how intercultural competence is demonstrated, there was no consensus on how it should be defined. In the study, participants were separated into two groups (one consisting of faculty members, the other of administrators). The two groups were given lists and asked to choose the most appropriate definition, the most important components, and the best way to assess intercultural competence. The results of the study showed that participants chose a variety of different responses to the questions. For example, on choosing the best definition for intercultural competence, the administrators preferred the proffered Byram (1997) definition of "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or interact; valuing others' values, beliefs and behaviors; and relativizing one's self" (p. 34), while the scholars, chose Deardorff's (2004) definition of "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 194). Though the definitions contain similarities, they differ in at least one important way. Both definitions refer or allude to an individual's intercultural knowledge and skills, but Deardorff's includes a reference to the effectiveness and appropriateness of the individual's behavior. While the scholars agree it is important that a person has knowledge about culture and the impact it plays in dictating other people's actions, values, and beliefs, they also felt it is equally important that when faced with people from different cultures, a person acts in a manner that does not offend others and in a manner that facilitates effective communication. Spitzberg (2009) provides insight

into why the scholars might have chosen the definition for intercultural competence that they did. He writes:

> competence is considered an ability or set of skilled behaviors. However, any given behavior or ability may be judged competent in one context, and incompetent in another. Consequently, competence cannot inhere in the behavior or ability itself. It must instead be viewed as a social evaluation of behavior. The social evaluation is composed of two primary criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness. (pp. 379-380)

Spitzberg (2009) says appropriateness is when accepted and valued rules, norms, and expectancies are not violated, and effectiveness is the accomplishment of valued goals and rewards relative to costs and alternatives. Therefore, the actions of a person in an intercultural context can be deemed competent when they accomplish a person's objectives in a manner that is appropriate to the context and relationships (Spitzberg, 2009). The scholars' choice of Deardorff's definition as the most apt differed from the administrators' choice in that it was considerate of how the sojourners' actions were both effective and appropriate in the context of the host culture; the Byram definition preferred by the administrators makes no mention of how the sojourner's experience is viewed or construed by the people in the host culture.

Components of Intercultural Competence

For over five decades, scholars have worked to identify exactly what it means for a person to be interculturally competent. Donald Tewksbury identified 21 characteristics of a mature international person in 1956 (in Kenworthy, 1956). Tewksbury's characteristics were primarily behavioral in nature, and largely reflected the experience of

an educated and privileged class who had opportunities to travel abroad. While many of his characteristics can be seen in contemporary iterations of intercultural competence, too many focused on narrow culture-specific topics and the political realities of the day. Examples of this are "14. Being able to discuss the Soviet Union and Communist China mildly" (Kenworthy, 1956, pg. 13), and "15. One who is thoroughly familiar with and actively supports the United Nations and its specialized agencies" (Kenworthy, 1956, pg. 13).

Wilson (1994) then adapted Tewksbury's list and identified nine characteristics of an interculturally competent person. They are:

1) Consciousness of one's own perspective and culture;

2) Awareness of differences among culture;

3) Lived knowledge of at least one culture other than one's own;

4) Ability to empathize with persons of other cultures;

5) Long-term friendships with several persons from other cultures;

6) Membership in at least one international organization;

7) State of the world awareness, including awareness of human choices;

8) Willingness to continue to learn about the world's people, cultures, and issues;

9) Commitment to working for a better world (Wilson, 1994, pg. 41)

Wilson's list eliminated many of Tewksbury's references to specific nations and political bodies, and consolidated them into what are culture-general frameworks like awareness of one's own cultural identities, awareness of differences among culture, and membership in specific international organizations. Further, Wilson's list includes characteristics that pertain to an individual's development in cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains

(i.e., how a person thinks, feels, and acts). Most contemporary intercultural experts' conceptions of intercultural competence incorporate the totality of the cognitive, behavioral, and affective realms (J. Bennett, 2008; J. Bennett, 2015; M. Bennett, 1993; Byram, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Goodykunst, 1991; Hamilton et al, 1998; Martin, 1987; Pusch, 2009; Pusch & Merrill, 2008; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ward et al, 2001).

Janet Bennett (2008) and Ward et al. (2001) provide a useful understanding the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains that are essential to an individual's intercultural competence. Bennett explains cognitive competency as culture-general and culture-specific knowledge, understanding of the cultural adaptation process, and most importantly, cultural self-awareness (Bennett, 2008). Ward et al (2001) explain that the cognitive domain is how a person perceives and makes judgments about people from other cultural groups. Behavioral competency presupposes cultural learning (Pusch & Merrill, 2008; Stephenson 2003), and is the ability to empathize, gather appropriate information, and to manage social interactions and anxiety (Bennett, 2008). Ward et al (2001) write that intercultural competence is indicated in the behavioral domain by awareness of both verbal and non-verbal communication, etiquette, and culturally bound conflict resolution strategies. Bennett (2008) also points out that the presence of cultural mentors, or someone who can help the sojourner navigate and make meaning of the host culture, is crucial to the development of behavioral skills. And the affective domain includes is a sojourner's level of curiosity, tolerance of ambiguity, cognitive flexibility, and resourcefulness (Bennett, 2008). Another aspect of the affective domain is the

factors which "facilitate and impede [the] psychological adjustment" of a sojourner (Ward et al, 2001, p. 2).

Using the term intercultural effectiveness, Paige (1993) presented a conceptual model which identifies factors that positively influence intercultural effectiveness. Paige's factors share similarities between other conceptions of intercultural competence, but they differ in that he makes a distinction between factors which are indicators of intercultural competence and those that explain it. In other words, indicators are how intercultural competence is demonstrated, while explanatory factors contribute to the definition of what it means to be interculturally competent. His indicators are:

1) Knowledge of the target [host] culture;

2) Behavioral skills like communicative competency and ability to relate to others;

3) Self-awareness, especially in relation to one's own values and beliefs;

4) Technical skills, including the ability to accomplish tasks within the new cultural setting (NOTE: this can be both an indicator and explanatory factor)

Explanatory factors of intercultural effectiveness:

1) Personal qualities of the sojourner like flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, sense of humor;

2) Situational factors such as relative similarity between the host and home culture, clarity of expectations, stress factors;

3) Technical skills, including the ability to accomplish tasks within the new cultural setting (again, this can be both an indicator and explanatory factor) (Paige, 1993, p. 171; Paige, 2012)

These factors mirror other conceptions with the inclusion of the behavioral, affective, and cognitive domains.

Lustig and Koester (1999) incorporate previous ideas on what constitutes intercultural competence into what they consider three key elements. They are:

> 1) Context - Whether or not a person is interculturally competent is dependent upon the specific relational and situational contexts. "Thus, competence is not an individual attribute; rather it is a characteristic of the association between individuals."
>
> 2) Appropriateness and effectiveness - Here appropriateness is defined as behaviors regarded as proper and suitable given the expectations in a culture, the constraints of the specific situation, and the nature of interactants' relationships. Effectiveness is behaviors that lead to the achievement of desired outcomes.
>
> 3) Knowledge, motivations, and actions - knowledge is both the culture-general and culture-specific information needed about the people, the context, and the norms of appropriateness in a specific culture. Motivations are the emotional associations people have (e.g. feelings and intentions) as they both anticipate and actually communicate with people interculturally. And actions are the actual manifestations of the behaviors that are judged to be interculturally competent. (Lustig & Koester, 1999, pp. 67-73).

Their conclusion is that while the aforementioned keys promote intercultural competence, they warn there is no true prescriptive set of characteristics which guarantee competence in all intercultural relationships and situations (Lustig & Koester, 1999).

In a review of her contemporary scholars' work theorizing about intercultural competence, Pusch (1994) recognized that the majority of work focused almost exclusively on the individual sojourner. She wrote that too much emphasis was placed on "the final version, or the ultimate of intercultural competency exhibited in particularly capable people" (Pusch, 1994, p. 205). In reality, Pusch writes that in international educational exchange experiences, it is highly unlikely that a person could attain the high levels of intercultural competence as demonstrated by the "constructive marginal" (Bennett, 1993) or the "universal communicator" (Gardner, 1962). Therefore, Pusch wrote that more emphasis needs to be placed on the dynamics of the exchange experience in order to understand how and what made developmental steps towards intercultural competence possible. Pusch (1994) distilled from the existing literature that most agreed that there are three general behavioral skills or abilities critical to intercultural competence. They are: 1) the ability to manage psychological stress; 2) the ability to communicate effectively; and 3) the ability to establish interpersonal relationships (Pusch, 1994, p. 206). In addition to these general skills and behaviors agreed upon by scholars, she further cites Gudykunst (1991) for what she believes are the most important competencies for a sojourner. They are: 1) mindfulness; 2) cognitive flexibility; 3) tolerance for ambiguity; 4) behavioral flexibility; and 5) cross-cultural empathy.

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Milton Bennett's work on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (1993) contradicts the notion of the salience of situational and relational contexts, as well as the fluidity of intercultural competence. Instead, Bennett proposes that an individual's developmental orientation dictates how a person perceives and

interacts with cultural difference, not the contextual elements of an intercultural situation. Bennett's DMIS (1993) and Hammer's adaptation (2012), are both significant to this study, as their concepts contribute directly to the way in which intercultural competence is defined here.

The DMIS posits that an individual's developmental orientation determines how they experience intercultural difference. Therefore, differentiation is a key concept in the model. Bennett writes:

> First, people differentiate phenomena in a variety of ways, and, second, that cultures differ fundamentally from one another in the way they maintain patterns of differentiation or worldviews. If a learner accepts this basic premise of ethnorelativism and interprets events according to it, then intercultural sensitivity and general intercultural effectiveness seem to increase. (Bennett, 1993, pg. 22)

Bennett finds that intercultural concepts associated with differentiation that are placed in the context of the DMIS's developmental orientation are more useful than a collection of intercultural components and elements, as detailed above. He writes "it is the construction of reality as increasingly capable of accommodating cultural difference that constitutes development" (Bennett, 1993, pg. 24). Thus, he defines intercultural sensitivity in terms of a continuum of stages with increasing recognition and acceptance of cultural difference (Bennett, 1993).

The stages of development are seen on a continuum of increasing sophistication, with ethnocentric stages at the foundational levels, progressing eventually to ethnorelative stages (Bennett, 1993). The three ethnocentric stages of the DMIS, in

order, are denial, defense, and minimization (Bennett, 1993). In the ethnocentric stages, individuals can only view cultural difference from their own cultural perspective. Denial is characterized as a person who does not consider the existence of cultural difference, and believes that cultural diversity only occurs elsewhere. Factors that contribute to denial are physical and psychological isolation, and separation, defined as the "intentional erection of physical and social barriers to create distance from cultural difference as a means to of maintaining a state of denial (Bennett, 1993, p. 32). Defense, then, is seen as a reaction to an individual's perception that cultural difference is in some way threatening. Bennett (1993) writes that "rather than simply denying difference in general, people in defense recognize specific cultural differences and create specific defenses against them" (p. 35). Defense is developmentally beyond denial because a person in defense actually recognizes the presence of cultural difference. Bennett states that defense often takes the form of either denigration, in which the an individual resorts to applying negative stereotypes towards different cultural groups, or superiority, in which a person "emphasizes the positive evaluation of one's own cultural status, not necessarily the denigration of other groups (Bennett, 1993, p. 37). Another manifestation of Defense is reversal, in which an individual denigrates their own culture and holds another culture to be superior to their own. And the final ethnocentric stage of the DMIS is minimization (Bennett, 1993). "Minimization represents a development beyond defense because cultural difference is acknowledged and is not negatively evaluated... Rather, cultural difference is trivialized" (Bennett, 1993, p. 41). In the minimization stage, human similarity is more important to the individual than cultural difference, and it allows people "to stand on the common ground of [their] shared humanity and put aside cultural

differences" (Bennett, 1993, p. 41). Minimization is a developmental step beyond defense and denial, but it is still deemed ethnocentric because it operates from the premise that all people share the same basic characteristics.

Beyond the ethnocentric stages of the DMIS are the ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett, 1993). Ethnorelative stages are characterized by greater recognition of, acceptance of, and adaptation to difference. Acceptance is a stage in which an individual both acknowledges and respects cultural difference. Two common forms of development in acceptance are respect for behavioral difference and respect for difference in values. Bennett writes that in acceptance, "valuing remains a process which can be pursued in various ways. Other cultures' different valuing is worthy of understanding and respect, but not agreement" (Bennett, 1993, pg. 50). After acceptance is adaptation, characterized by enhanced skills for communicating and relating to people from other cultures (Bennett, 1993). Bennett (1993) writes that a major concern for people in the Adaptation stage is the development of alternative communication skills. He writes:

> People of the same culture more or less understand the language and actions of each other. No such assumption can be made cross-culturally without recourse to an ethnocentric stage...Thus, ethnorelative communication must posit an approach to common meaning that includes variable worldviews. (Bennett, 1993, p. 52)

Bennett goes on to suggest the concept of pluralism and empathy as phases through which an individual goes through to change their cultural frame of reference for the purpose of communication (Bennett, 1993). And the final stage of development on the DMIS scale is integration (Bennett, 1993). Integration describes the attempt of an

individual to integrate disparate aspects of their identity into a new whole while remaining on the margin of two or more cultures (Bennett, 1993). Bennett (1993) writes "the goal of [integration] is not to reaffiliate with one culture, nor is it simply to reestablish comfort with a multiplicity of worldviews. Rather the integrated person understands that his/her identity emerges from the act of defining identity itself" (p. 60).

Bennett's original conception of the DMIS was revised by Hammer (2009). Hammer used the DMIS as the basis for his Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which places participants of the inventory on the developmental continuum. Based on his research using the IDI, he made four significant changes to the DMIS. First, whereas Bennett called the first early stages ethnocentric and the final stages as ethnorelative, Hammer changed ethnocentric to monocultural mindset, and ethnorelative to intercultural mindset (Hammer, 2009). Second, Bennett's model name for the second stage was defense, in which a person could have reversal characteristics. Hammer found it more accurate to rename the second stage polarization, and found that people in polarization would display either defense or reversal characteristics (Hammer, 2009). And third, a limitation of Bennett's model was the relative similarity of the adaptation and integration stages. In Hammer's update, there are only two intercultural mindset stages - acceptance and adaptation (2009).

To sum up this section, the development of intercultural competence is a desired outcome of participation in international education. Intercultural competence is defined as the ability to act appropriately and effectively when faced with cultural difference. Further, intercultural competence is largely the product of a person's capacity to shift cultural perspective, intercultural competence is gained through a developmental - often

deliberate - process, and is integrated into a person's cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. Scholars have identified a variety of variables pertaining to a sojourner's exchange experience that can impact the development of intercultural competence. These variables can be seen as either indications of an individual's intercultural competence or explanations of it. But we can see the development of intercultural competence is dependent upon more than just the individual sojourner's skills and abilities. Variables unrelated to the individual's personality can have a considerable impact on the development of intercultural competence.

It is necessary at this point to make a distinction between international education exchange programs and study abroad programs. The definition of an international education exchange program is extremely broad and is meant to encompass the totality of programs which are conducted in an international setting. The definition used for this study is:

> a sojourn in another cultural milieu, which is extensive in duration, and which involves intensive exposure to the other culture, its people, and its institutions. Exchange is typically undertaken for purposes of formal study, language proficiency, skill development, personal development, increased knowledge of host country, or improved international understanding and relations. The exchange experience may be programmatic (organized) or individualized (independently arranged, and it can occur across a range of educational levels" (Bachner & Zeutschel, pp. 20-21).

Study abroad, on the other hand, is used here to describe programs and experiences that fit within specific parameters. Study abroad is an experience that ranges from 3 months

to one year in duration, in which students complete part of their higher education experience through activities outside their home institution and country (Brzezinski, 2010; Hoff, 2008; Martin, 1987). As such, study abroad programs are defined here as a distinct subset of international education exchange. The UGRAD program is defined here as a study abroad program, as the experience is only part of the participants' higher education degree they are pursuing in their home country. UGRAD participants do not receive degrees from the U.S. institutions they attend for one year.

With a better understanding of the way intercultural competence is defined for this study, the question that remains is how is it developed in study abroad experience? Again, research shows participation in international exchange alone does not guarantee an increase in intercultural competence (Bachner, 2004; Braskamp, 2008; Che et al, 2009; Hess, 1994; Kauffman et al, 1992; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Montrose, 2002; Stephenson, 2002; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009). So why is it that some exchange participants grow in terms of intercultural competence and others do not?

Research on the Development of Intercultural Competence in International Education Exchange and Study Abroad

Thematic Triad

In her study of U.S. study abroad participants in Chile, Skye Stephenson (2002) developed the concept of a Thematic Triad to explain the ideal conditions for the development of what she terms cross-cultural deepening. Stephenson's concept of deepening, which she calls the ability of an individual to cognitively shift their cultural frame of reference in relation to cross-cultural encounters (Stephenson, 2002), is incorporated into the working definition of intercultural competence for this study.

Therefore, the terms intercultural competence will be used in lieu of cultural deepening in this section. According to Stephenson, the three thematic areas that promote the development of intercultural competence are: 1) personal factors; 2) host culture characteristics, events, and relations with the home culture; and 3) program characteristics (2002). Stephenson finds these distinct - yet interrelated – thematic areas influence the cultural learning process and outcome of a study abroad experience.

The personal factors in thematic area 1 (Figure 2) are the individual competencies, experiences, and attitudes that a person brings to their study abroad experience. For example, factors such as the individual's language abilities, amount of their previous cross-cultural exposure, and their use of traits like empathy, flexibility, and open-mindedness all impact a study abroad participant's ability to experience deepening. Stephenson's research showed that personal factors are "by far the most important of the three in shaping whether the study abroad participant finishes his/her experience with a deepened understanding of the host culture or not" (Stephenson, 2002, p. 93). The factors in thematic area 2 (Figure 3) are a collection of the dynamics relating to how the home culture of the study abroad participant interacts with the host culture. Also, specific events (e.g. opportunities to interact with people in the host culture) and circumstances that take place in the host culture (e.g. receptivity of the host culture nationals to foreigners) are factors in thematic area 2. Thematic area 3 (Figure 4) is a collection of the characteristics and personnel of the actual study abroad program. Examples of these are the support of the program staff, the amount of language training available, and features like duration of the program and living arrangements.

The different factors that influence each of the three thematic areas are listed in the tables below. Stephenson presents the factors in paired groups, which represent "the polarity of potentialities, with the term listed to the left indicating something that can impede and/or make more difficult [the development of intercultural competence], while the one to the right is what may serve to [promote the development of intercultural competence]" (Stephenson, 2002, p. 90). Therefore, the more a study abroad participant's responses to the factors skew to the right in the paired "factor continuums," the more potential there is for that person to develop intercultural competence (Stephenson, 2002, p. 90). Stephenson points out, however, that the factors she provides do not represent the complete list of all possible developmental factors. She also explains that the diverse factors are not intended to be weighted equally, as each individual participant will have likely have "a different spectrum and weighting of factors influencing his/her own understanding of the host culture (Stephenson, 2002, p. 90).

Figure 2
Thematic Area 1: Personal Factors

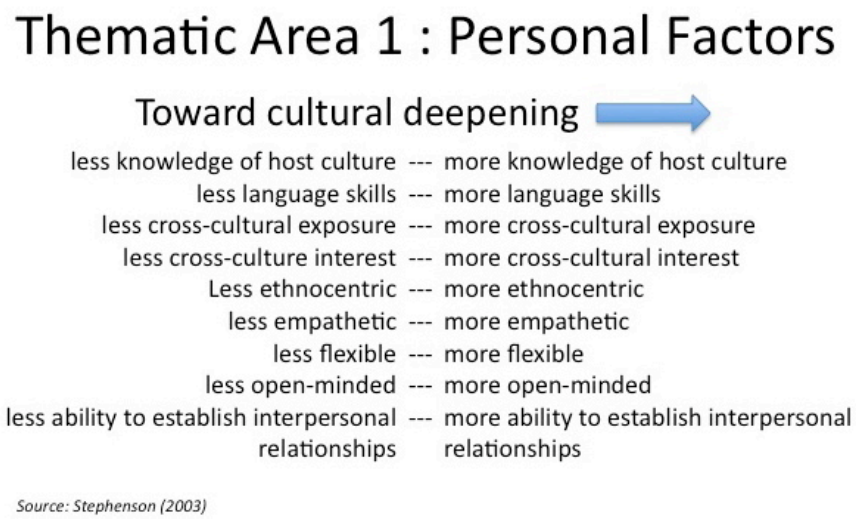
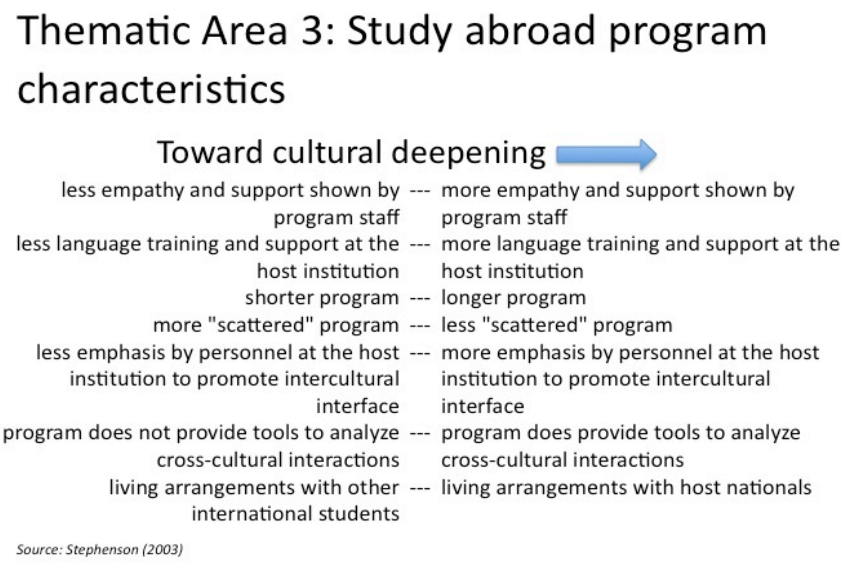


Figure 3

Thematic Area 2: Home/host Culture Characteristics

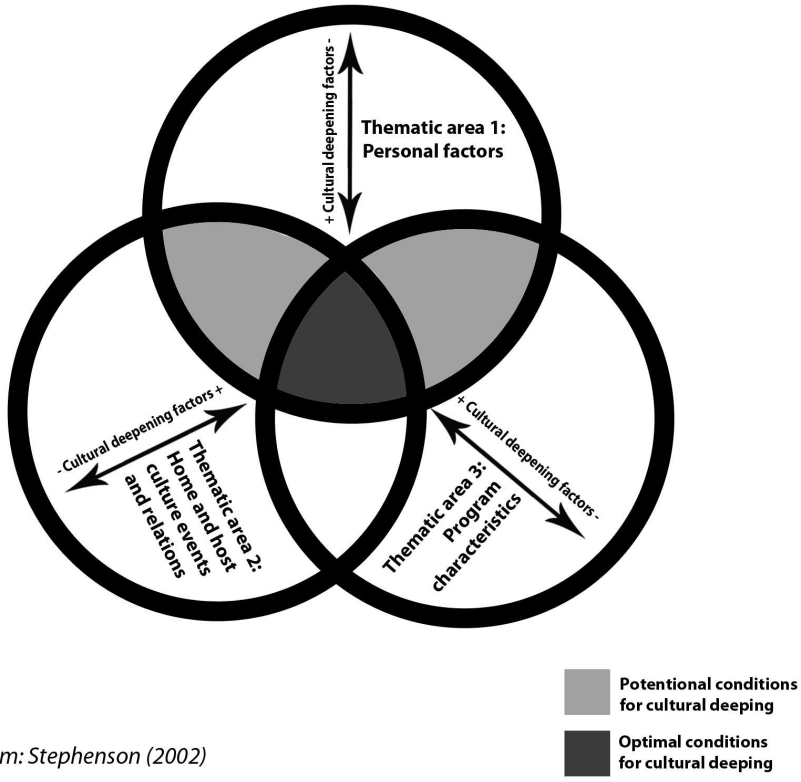
Figure 4

Thematic Area 3: Study Abroad Program Characteristics



Even though the Stephenson posits that thematic area 1 (personal factors) is most important in terms of promoting what she refers to as deepening, all three work synergistically together and can impact one another in significant ways. As can be seen

Figure 5
Thematic Triad



Adapted from: Stephenson (2002)

in Figure 5, there is a "dynamic feedback process" (Stephenson, 2002, p. 95) between the three thematic area in which all three can influence factors in the other two. For example, certain personal characteristics can influence how the individual interprets the host culture; aspects of the host culture can influence certain factors of the program and personnel; and certain aspects of the program and personnel can influence development of participant's personal characteristics (Stephenson, 2002).

It is when the responses to an individual's factors within all three thematic areas skew towards the right that conditions of a study abroad experience are ideal for the development of intercultural competence (Stephenson, 2002). Predominantly right

skewing continua for an individual in only one of the thematic areas is not enough to produce ideal conditions for the development of intercultural competence. As can be seen in the diagram, the continua must be skewed in at least two thematic areas (with one necessarily being thematic Area 1 - personal characteristics) to produce *potential* conditions for development (Stephenson, 2002). "Optimal" conditions, then, are when the continua in all three thematic areas skew to the right. Interestingly, if an individual skews to the right in thematic areas 2 and 3, but not 1, there is practically no potential for an individual to develop intercultural competence (Stephenson, 2002). As Stephenson explains, "the best study abroad program located in a remarkable receptive host culture environment cannot in and of itself bring about greater cross-cultural understanding if the participant is not receptive to the experience" (2002, p. 96).

Unfortunately, the validity of the Thematic Triad is largely untested, as Stephenson only applied it in a small-scale experiment that involved a relatively small number of study abroad students. Therefore, in order for the model to be applicable to this study, it is necessary to analyze the concept in relation to other research projects that focus on study abroad and the development of intercultural competence.

In an attempt to get empirical data on the effects of study abroad, the Study Abroad Evaluation Project (SAEP) analyzed a large number of study abroad programs in Europe, United Kingdom, and United States in order to identify factors for the success achieved by the programs and participants (Opper et al., 1990). Success was defined in this study as positive outcomes for the participants in the areas of academic progress, cultural learning, increased foreign language proficiency, and professional development. SAEP found four distinct structures that can affect whether or not study abroad program

participants have positive outcomes. The explanatory structures are 1) background of participating students, 2) students' experiences abroad, 3) study abroad program context, objectives, and characteristics, and 4) problems abroad (Opper et al., 1990). These four structures are very similar to Stephenson's triad, and provide support for her supposition of the Thematic Triad promotes intercultural learning.

A study by Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) examined how program duration impacts cultural learning and language acquisition, but found there to be other contributing variables at play. She suggests organizing the other variables into the three following categories, which mirror Stephenson's triad:

> 1) Internal: consisting of student backgrounds, characteristics, and personal circumstances (similar to Stephenson's thematic area 1 – personal factors; e.g. participant's previous intercultural experience, language proficiency, and academic discipline);
>
> 2) External-Program: consisting of choices made by the study abroad office (similar to Stephenson's thematic area 3 – program features; e.g. duration, academic content, pre-departure and on-site orientations, availability of study abroad faculty director, etc.);
>
> 3) External-Students: consisting of choices made by students (similar to Stephenson's thematic area 2 – relations with host culture; e.g. independent travel, amount of interaction with host country nationals, etc.) (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004, p. 192)

Engle and Engle's Defining Components of Study Abroad Programs

Engle and Engle (2003) also find that certain personal factors and program components enhance study abroad participants' ability to develop intercultural competence. But whereas Stephenson claims the personal characteristics of the study abroad participant is the most important factor, Engle and Engle argue the type of study abroad program is most important. Addressing a need to delineate between the objectives and features of the numerous types of study abroad programs offered, Engle and Engle created a classification of study abroad programs that gives providers and participants alike much needed clarity and understanding. Engle and Engle first make a necessary distinction between "culture-based international education" and "knowledge-transfer study abroad" programs (2003, p. 4). The latter is primarily classroom based and focuses on the development of objective culture information (i.e. history, art, and politics), while the former is concerned with subjective culture learning (i.e. the shared and maintained values, assumptions and patterns of thought and behavior by interacting groups) and in-classroom and outside-classroom experiences (Bennett & Bennett, 1994, p. 154; Engle & Engle, 2003). Thus, based on this distinction, culture-based international education programs are more conducive to the development of intercultural competence than knowledge-transfer study abroad programs. Engle and Engle's work focuses on culture-based study abroad programs.

Engle and Engle write that any study abroad program which aims to promote cultural learning should "present participants with a challenge – the emotional and intellectual challenge of direct, authentic, cultural encounters and guided reflection upon those encounters" (2003, pp. 6-7). Using Bennett's DMIS, they write that an appropriate

goal for any culture based exchange participant is "movement as far as possible forward" on the DMIS scale (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 7). To identify the various elements of an exchange program that can challenge participants and promote the development of intercultural competence, Engle and Engle identified what they call "seven defining components of overseas programs" (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 8). They are:

1) Length of student sojourn;
2) Target language competence at entry;
3) Language used in course work;
4) Context of academic work;
5) Types of student housing;
6) Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning;
7) Guided reflection on cultural experience (Engle & Engle, 2003)

Then, using the defining components above as variables, Engle and Engle make a distinction between five levels of study abroad programs. The five different levels can be seen in Table 2 below. The delineation of these levels is useful in providing a basis for understanding of how the opportunity and ability to develop intercultural competence as part of a study abroad experience differ according to the program type. Given the different levels, all programs are not equal in terms of the amount of intercultural competence development that can reasonably be expected as an outcome. In the context of this study, UGRAD participants experience either a Level 4: Cross-cultural encounter program or a Level 5: Cross-cultural immersion program, depending on the types of experiences they have at their host institution in regards to the housing, provisions for cultural interactions, and guided reflection on cultural experience components.

In an attempt to test how their defining components impact intercultural competence, Engle and Engle studied the development of intercultural competence among participants in both semester and year-long programs at American University Center in Provence (AUCP) (2004). Their study revealed a couple important things. First, it confirmed that longer study abroad programs promote increased progression on

Table 2
Engle and Engle's Levels of Study Abroad Programs

Program component	Level 1: Study tour	Level 2: Short-term study	Level 3: Cross-cultural contact program	Level 4: Cross-cultural encounter program	Level 5: Cross-cultural immersion program
Duration	A few days to a couple weeks	3 – 8 weeks	Semester	Semester - academic year	Semester - academic year
Entry target-language competence	Elementary - intermediate	Elementary-intermediate	Elementary-intermediate	Intermediate-advanced	Advanced
Language of course work	Native language	Native language and target language	Native language and target language	Predominantly target language	Target language in all curricular and extra-curricular activities
Academic work context	Home institution faculty	In-house or institution with international students	Student group or with other international students	In house student group	Local norms, partial or complete direct enrollment
Housing	Collective	Collective and/or home stay	Collective, home stay visit, home stay rental	Home stay rental or integration home stay	Individual integration homestay
Provisions for cultural interactions /ex-periential learning	None	None	None or limited	Optional participation in occasional integration activities	Required regular participation in cultural integration programs, extensive direct cultural contact
Guided reflection on cultural experience	None	Orientation program	Orientation program	Orientation program, initial and ongoing	Ongoing orientation program, mentoring, course in cross-cultural perspectives, reflective writing

Adapted from Engle and Engle, 2003, pp. 10-11

the IDI (Engle & Engle, 2004). Students who studied at AUCP for a full academic year experienced significantly more development on the IDI than those who only studied there for one semester. In addition, they found the period of greatest intercultural development for the year-long participants was during their second semester. Second, they found that "skillful mentoring, which guides, informs, inspires, and stimulates the learning process" clearly led to development of intercultural competence among the AUCP study abroad participants (Engle & Engle, 2004, p. 232). While the conclusions from this study support the notion that there are certain components that enhance intercultural development in the study abroad experience, the study was limited in scope and did not attempt to replicate the findings with any groups other than the AUCP students.

Putting Engle and Engle's components in the context of the Stephenson's Thematic Triad (2003), Engle and Engle place more emphasis on the elements in thematic rea 3 – program characteristics. Six of their seven defining components fall into thematic area 3, while only one - target language competency - falls into thematic area 1 - personal characteristics. This distinction is important because Stephenson contends that no matter what happens in thematic areas 2 and 3, the chances of a study abroad participant developing intercultural competence are slim if they do not have the proper personal characteristics in place. Engle and Engle's findings, especially about the impact of program duration and the presence of cultural mentoring, would suggest that the factors in thematic area 3 are most important.

Using Engle and Engle's seven defining components as their independent variables, the researchers in the Georgetown Consortium Project documented the intercultural, language, and disciplinary learning that takes place for U.S. study abroad

participants and sought to identify the impact that those variables had on that learning (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). One significant conclusion of this study is that most of Engle and Engle's defining components are associated with intercultural learning. The program components most associated with positive intercultural competence development are program duration, pre-departure target language study, target language study during the study abroad experience, content courses in target language, classroom composition (i.e. with other U.S. students, or a combination of other U.S. students, international students and host country students), type of housing, and cultural mentoring; those not associated with the development of intercultural competence are location of courses and home country faculty teaching the course (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Interestingly, whereas most factors correlate interaction with host country nationals and positive intercultural competence development, the classroom composition component shows the opposite. This study found that U.S. students who did their coursework alongside both U.S. and international students had greater intercultural gains than those who studied entirely with host country students (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Further, those who reported spending the majority of their free time with host country nationals actually diminished in intercultural competence whereas those who gained the most reported spending between 26-50% of their free time interacting with host nationals. The authors posit an explanation for this finding can be found in Stanford's theory of challenge and support (1966), in which the best learning experiences are a balance between challenge and support. If a learning environment is too comfortable, little is learned. Also, learning is difficult if the environment is too difficult. U.S. study abroad students who enroll in classes strictly with host country students may

not develop interculturally because they find themselves in too challenging of a situation. But as opposed to suggesting U.S. study abroad participants spend less time with host country nationals in and out of the classroom, the authors cite the importance of cultural mentors to assist in intercultural competence development in these situations.

A second significant finding is the importance of cultural mentors on the development of intercultural competence for study abroad participants. They write:

> a sizeable number of students abroad did not learn significantly more than control students. A sizeable number did not or could not take advantage of intercultural learning opportunities…. In short, these students, when left to their own devices, failed to learn well even when 'immersed' in another culture" (Vande Berg et al, 2009, p. 25)

This finding suggests the need for the presence of a cultural mentor to intervene and promote the development of intercultural competency. They write "the presence or absence of a well-trained cultural mentor who meets frequently with students may be the single most important intervention to improve student intercultural learning abroad" (Vande Berg et al, 2009, p. 25). In the context of the Thematic Triad, the presence of a cultural mentor fits into thematic area 3 – program characteristics.

Bachner and Zeutschel (2009) conducted a longitudinal study on the long-term impact that participation in the Youth For Understanding (YFU) program had on teen-aged U.S. and German participants. Their study concluded that, in general, international educational exchange contributes to long lasting positive attitudinal, behavioral, and cognitive changes for the participants (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009). In reaching their conclusion, they found that many factors contributed to positive program outcomes, such

as prior intercultural experiences and realistic expectations of the exchange experience, but the living arrangements and host family experience was the singular most important and influential aspect in terms of positive outcomes of the exchange. Their findings corroborate Stephenson's and others' notions that several variables are integral to the development of intercultural competence in a study abroad program. But at the same time, the findings contradict the supposition that personal factors are the most influential theme. Like Engle and Engle, Bachner and Zeutschel find that program factors like home stay environment are most important.

Research studies have also provided evidence that supports the notion that the longer the duration of a study abroad program, the greater the probability that participants will develop intercultural competence. Comparing the outcomes of participants of academic year-long study abroad programs to those of a shorter duration, Dwyer (2004) found the duration of the program to have a positive effect on:

- sophistication of worldview;
- understanding of their own cultural values and biases;
- interest in other languages/cultures;
- lifelong friends with host country nationals; and
- greater diversity of friends (Dwyer, 2004)

In addition to the development of intercultural competence, program duration also positively influences participants in many other ways. For example, year-long participants are more likely than participants of programs of shorter durations to attain graduate degrees, engage in international work or volunteer activities, and be involved in community organizations (Dwyer, 2004).

Another study that provides evidence that the duration of study abroad programs can positively impact cultural learning was conducted by Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004). She compared University of Maryland students who participated in either a 7-week or 16-week program in Mexico. She found that the those who participated in the 16-week program had more significant development on the IDI, had a deeper understanding of Mexican culture, and had a more critical and informed view of the U.S. than those who participated in the 7-week program (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). This study and others (Erwin & Coleman, 1998; Ingraham & Peterson, 2003) provide support of Stephenson's (in thematic area 3) and Engle and Engle's contention that program duration is an important component in study abroad that impacts the development of intercultural competence.

To sum up literature reviewed in this section, a Thematic Triad is presented as a conceptual model that uses a selection of the factors and characteristics of study abroad participants and programs to indicate ideal conditions for the development of intercultural competence. There is a significant body of research that supports the inclusion of the various characteristics in each of the different themes of the triad, with differing results as to which elements are most important. The research literature warrants the use of the Thematic Triad as a conceptual framework for this study, but it must be modified to be inclusive of cultural mentorship and experiential learning, which will be discussed in the next sections.

Further, while this research project cannot retroactively assess the development of intercultural competence of UGRAD alumni directly attributable to their participation in the program, we know from the research that certain personal characteristics and program

features known to contribute to the development of intercultural competence in study abroad experiences are present in all UGRAD participants' experiences. Those common elements are: year-long program, high level of target language (English) proficiency at entry, academic coursework done in target language, and according to the norms of the host country. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the other factors that were present in the UGRAD alumni's experiences in order to determine the extent to which opportunities to develop interculturally were present and use those findings as a proxy for actual, quantifiable intercultural competence.

It should be noted that a limitation of this review is that the preponderance of research involved U.S. students and their study abroad experience. This is the body of literature reviewed here mainly because it represents the focus of the majority of research done on the topic. There is a considerable body of literature on the experiences of international students in the U.S., but virtually none that make a distinction between international education exchange and the short-term nature of study abroad. Also, much of the research concerning international students in the U.S. focuses on topics like social and cultural adjustment, academic performance, and program satisfaction (Abel, 2002; Guidry-Lacina, 2002; Ozturgut & Murphy, 2009; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Snow-Andrade, 2006; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhai, 2002) - not the development of intercultural competence. Further, findings from these research projects support the notion that the most salient issues that influence the experience and outcomes of international students studying in the U.S. are cultural in nature, and are therefore similar to those that influence U.S. students studying abroad.

Experiential Learning Theory

While the Thematic Triad is useful in identifying important elements that promote the development intercultural competence as part of a study abroad experience, what it fails to take into consideration are certain aspects of experiential learning that have also been demonstrated to promote intercultural competence. The next section will include a review of the literature that has further identified best practices in study abroad that are effective in developing intercultural competence.

Savicki (2008) writes an "effective application of the experiential learning approach can maximize the likelihood of positive outcomes for study abroad students" (p. 74). It is therefore important to have an understanding of it and how it applies to the development of intercultural competence as part of a study abroad program. Stemming from the ideas of educators like John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Paolo Friere, the concept of experiential learning is learning is "most effectively achieved if the learner is actively engaged on more than just an abstract intellectual level with the material to be learned" (Laubscher, 1994).

In Dewey's view, experiential education was not an addition to education, but an integral part, and that thinking has a dynamic and creative relationship with doing (Steinberg, 2002). Further, Dewey's thoughts are applicable to international education exchange and study abroad in that he noted that life involves interrelationships, cooperation, and groups; as such, "interest in learning from all the contracts of life is an essential moral interest" (in Steinberg, 2002, p. 211). Dewey points out, however, that while true education is rooted in experience, not all experiences are educative

(Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002). Also, some experiences could be miseducative if they prohibit further growth or understanding.

For Piaget, experiential education is a model of learning and cognitive development which situates learning "in the mutual interaction of the process of accommodation of concepts or schemas to experience in the world and the process of assimilation of events and experiences from the world into existing concepts and schemas" (Cintron & Kline, 2001, p. 20). For Piaget, the role of perturbation, or strife, is central to the emergence of new cognitive structures (Che, Spearman, & Manizade, 2009). Felt perturbation leads to a disequilibrium that forces an individual to go beyond their current state and reach out to new directions (Becker, 2004). According to Che, Spearman, and Manizade (2009), "disequilibrium occurs when one becomes aware of contradictions or inconsistencies in one's schema, and when this awareness results in dissatisfaction or discomfort with one's current state" (p. 103). Piaget felt that perturbation was vital for development and that it was the most influential factor in creating new knowledge structures, and that the new knowledge structures serve to bring about a reorganization of one's own cognitive schemes (Becker, 2004). Felt perturbation or disequilibrium is then important because it represents a "point of no return," in that "once one is aware of inadequacies of one's own cognitive structures, one cannot be satisfied with retreating, so the construction of new spaces of meaning that expand and modify the existing schema becomes more likely (Che, Spearman, & Manizade, 2009, p. 103).

Freire's contribution to experiential learning was pedagogy for critical consciousness (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002). In his *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed (1970), he calls attention to how power plays a role in education and how certain sectors of society (namely those who are oppressed) are ignored or invalidated in education. Further, he calls for pedagogy to develop critical thinking skills through dialogue, or collective reflection and analysis.

And finally, Kolb created what he called a simple description of the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). Kolb's experiential learning cycle begins with a concrete experience, followed by observation and reflection. Based on the observation and reflection, abstract concepts and generalizations are formed, from which implications for action are deduced (Montrose, 2002). Finally, these concepts and generalizations are tested in new situations, the results of which are the basis for new concrete experiences that start the cycle again. This learning cycle is meant to be a continuing spiral in which the learning that occurs as a result of the new knowledge gained is formulated into a prediction for the next concrete experience (Montrose, 2002).

Combing the works of Mintz and Hesser (1996), who identify three key principles as service learning of collaboration, reciprocity, and diversity, with the National Society for Experiential Education (1998), which developed "eight principles of good practice for all experiential learning activities," Lutterman-Aguillar and Gingerich (2002) developed their own "Key principles guiding experiential pedagogy in study abroad" (p. 48). They are:

1) Process and personal integration/process: effective experiential education should pay attention to the learner's personal development and ability to integrate the educational experience into their own life. With this in mind, the authors suggest that one of the articulated goals of study abroad should be the development of deeper self-awareness.

Also, experiential education abroad should involve some kinds of personal challenges that supersede the academic/intellectual requirements. Wallace (1993) writes that "an increased self-confidence, a deeper awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses, and a heightened knowledge of effective approaches to other human beings - all come from having functioned successfully in a strange environment and under a different set of ground rules from those found in one's own culture" (p. 13).

2) Problem based content: the content of the curriculum that is most effective for experiential learning is one that is based on real-life problems. The curriculum should require critical analysis of a problematic reality. The authors write that "if one of the goals of study abroad is to foment global citizenship, then it must broaden the students' horizons by helping them to identify the problems and concerns of others within the global community" (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002, p. 54).

3) Critical analysis and reflection: experiential education requires reflection and critical analysis of experiences in order to make the experiences educational. Dewey (1998) writes that reflection "is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and a disciplined mind" (p. 87). The authors also say that students must reflect both on their own and in groups. And it is often necessary to teach the student how to reflect. Effective reflection will include components of affect - or feelings and emotions, behavior - the nature of one's behavior and the reasons for it, and cognition - or the conceptualization of the content being learned (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002).

4) Collaboration and dialogue: in study abroad, cooperative learning, dialogue, and constructive conflict should not be limited to only the community of learners; it should also include diverse members of the host culture, as they are the true experts of the culture. Those engaging with the learners in the cooperative learning and dialogue should have opposing or conflicting viewpoints (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002).

5) Community: The authors stress that in order for international experiential educators to create conditions for critical analysis and reflection, they must devote time and effort to establishing a healthy learning community. Community in this sense is both the community of learners and participants from the host culture as discussed in the previous principle, but also the understanding of how the learner identifies with their home culture community and the larger global community (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002).

6) Diversity and intercultural communication: study abroad participants should not only be immersed in the host country culture, they should also be exposed to the diversity of people, ideas, and experiences in the host culture. Mintz and Hesser (1996) write that "an appreciation for and an understanding of diversity do not happen by chance. Working within diverse contexts requires deliberate attention to cultural differences and commonalities. as well as to the links among power, privilege, prejudice, and oppression" (p. 64). The authors also state that experiential educators in study abroad should make learners aware that all nations include dominant cultures and dominated cultures (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002).

7) Action and social transformation: Becoming agents of change is a natural expectation for study abroad participants because critical analysis and reflection leads to conscientization, which Boston (1973) writes is "a shift in mentality involving an

accurate, realistic assessment of one's locus in nature and society, a capacity to analyze the causes and consequences of that, the ability to compare it with other possibilities, and finally a disposition to act in order to change the received situation" (p. 28). When education is centered around problems that require solving, it is natural for the learners then to take action. The authors write that "by critically reflecting upon and analyzing problem based content together with diverse community members in the international setting engaging in a dialogue and collaborating with others, students can become empowered and develop the skills they need in order to take action that makes a difference in the world, because some of the skills necessary are precisely an awareness of cultural differences and the abilty to listen to others, to engage in a respectful dialogue, and to analyze problems critically from multiple angles, and to collaborate (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002, p. 68).

8) Mutuality and reciprocity: the issue of mutuality and reciprocity is the respect for the host communities and ensuring that program relationships with communities "are not undermining their goal of increasing global understanding by instead engaging in acts of cultural invasion" (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002, p. 70).

9) Facilitation by trained faculty and staff: study abroad students do not gain intercultural competence by chance; rather, it requires intentional facilitation. The authors write that the facilitators value the knowledge and experience of the learners and see them as co-learners, "involved in a mutual task of unveiling reality and creating knowledge together (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002, p. 72). Facilitators should have an understanding of cognitive development and learning processes in order to challenge the learners, but not to the point that the lessons become mis-educative. Another important

aspect of this principle is the need for the facilitator to prepare the learner for re-entry nto their own home culture, as students often report high levels of anxiety about the return home (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002).

10) Evaluation and assessment: finally, international experiential education requires ongoing evaluation and assessment in order to ensure that learners are meeting their objectives. (Lutterman-Aguillar & Gingerich, 2002).

To summarize, Stephenson's Thematic Triad (2002) is the primary conceptual framework used in this study as the basis for examining factors and conditions of an international education exchange program that create potential and ideal conditions for the development of intercultural competence. However, when analyzing the Thematic Triad through the lens of experiential learning theory, it is evident that an overlap of many factors and conditions are present, but there are also many important aspects that are absent. The salient components gleaned from experiential learning theory that will be included as paired continuum factors in the Thematic Triad are as follows:

In thematic area 1 - Personal factors related to the student:

1) less cultural self-awareness --- more cultural self-awareness;

2) academic coursework while in the U.S. had little personal relevance to the participant --- academic coursework had much personal relevance;

In thematic area 2 - Host culture characteristics, as well as the events and relations with the student's home culture:

1) fewer meaningful relationships with cultural mentors who could help explain the host culture --- more meaningful relationships with cultural mentors;

2) little feeling of belonging to a community including host culture natives --- greater feeling of belonging to a community including host culture native;

3) fewer incidences that problematized, or challenged, the personal beliefs and/or cultural identity of the participant --- more incidences

In thematic area 3 - Program characteristics and personnel:

1) less understanding of the UGRAD program objectives --- greater understanding;

2) less satisfaction with pre-departure orientation information --- more satisfaction with pre-departure orientation information;

3) less preparation for re-entry into home culture --- more preparation;

4) fewer formal opportunities to reflect and critically analyze the exchange experiences --- more opportunities

The Kyrgyz Republic/UGRAD Context

The Kyrgyz Republic (also commonly referred to as Kyrgyzstan and Kirghizia) was established as an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation in 1924 (Abazov, 2004). Prior to its incorporation into the Russian Federation, the Central Asian land was a comprised of a series of tribes, populated by communities that were organized around kinship, with each family belonging to a larger clan (Anderson, 1999). Prior to 1924, there was no clear administrative delimitation in the area, and traditional law regulated the boundaries (Abazov, 2004). In 1934, the nation became the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR). This change made it officially part of the Soviet Union, but also allowed it constitutional rights to maintain some autonomy in cultural and administrative affairs (Abazov, 2004). As part of the Soviet command economy, the

majority of previously nomadic Kyrgyz people were forced out of their traditional mountain pasture homes and into collective farms and urban areas for factory production jobs. During its time in the Soviet Union, the KSSR became one of the most ethnically diverse republics (Abazov, 2004). It was reported that in 1959, only 40 percent of the country was comprised of ethnic Kyrgyz (Abazov, 2004). This diversity is explained in large part by a post-World War II Soviet economic restructuring that saw many new productions plants brought to the area. Along with the new plants came an almost entirely Slavic workforce (Abazov, 2004).

The Kyrgyz Republic would then become an independent nation on August 31, 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The nation's first president, Askar Akayev, was committed to making the country a truly democratic nation, and with its pro-reform posture, it became the "*Wunderkind*" of the international donor community (Gleason, 2004, p. 15). According to Gleason (2004), the Kyrgyz Republic became the first former Soviet republic to follow the advice of the international donor community by eliminating the *ruble* as its currency, adopting a Western-style civil society, liberalizing prices, creating a modern legal and regulatory framework, and adopting an open political system.

Though the leaders of the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic did create a far more democratic governmental framework than their Central Asian neighbors, in its two decades of independence, it has fallen short of the ideal democratic standards of more economically developed nations (Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003). One major failing has been the tendency of its presidents and others in popularly elected positions, to routinely consolidate their power and increasingly use corrupt methods to maintain their

positions and enhance their personal wealth (Huskey, 2010). This is due, in large part, to the problem that, despite the façade of a stated commitment to democratic ideals, the people of Kyrgyz Republic, then and now, have no real notion of what it means to be a true democratic state (Heyneman, 2004).

Civil Society in Post-Communist State

Many have written about a correlation between a true democratic society and the existence of a strong civil society, and that civil society has been unable to establish strong roots in the republic of the former Soviet Union, including the Kyrgyz Republic (Babajanian, Freizer, & Stevens, 2005; Earle, 2005; Gibson, 2001; Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003; Howard, 2002; Manor, Robinson, & White, 1999: Mondak & Gearing, 1998; Narozhna, 2004; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Roy, 2002). Manor, Robinson, and White (1999) define civil society as:

> an intermediate realm situated between state and household, populated by organized groups or associations which are separate from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests, values or identities. (p. 4)

Civil society is seen in democratic states as a necessary agent for limiting the power of authoritarian governments, enforcing political accountability, reducing social atomization, and improving the inclusiveness of government (Manor, Robinson, & White (1999). Gibson (2001) identifies different forms of civil society at the political systems level and the individual level. The political systems level is similar to the desription provided by Manor et al. above. But at the individual level, it is the existence of a certain

set of attitudes and behavioral orientations towards politics, including a certain style of interpersonal interaction and collaboration (Gibson, 2001).

Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) write that civil society does not manifest itself in the same way in every situation. Civil society can be an intermediate realm between the person and the state, as suggested by Manor et al. (1999), but in other instances it can function as its own sector, along with family, business, and the state. In this conception, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) summarize three main characteristics of civil society:

> 1) It is the sector of voluntary action within institutional forms that are distinct from those of the state, family, and market, keeping in mind that, in practice, the boundaries between these sectors are often complex and blurred. (p. 2)
>
> 2) It consists of a large and diverse set of voluntary organizations, often competing with each other and oriented to specific interests. It comprises non-state actors and associations that are not purely driven by private or economic interests, are autonomously organized, and interact in the public sphere. (p. 3)
>
> 3) It is independent from the state, but it is oriented toward and interacts closely with the state and the political sphere. (p. 3)

Though civil society can mean different things in different contexts, Edwards (2004) writes that in all contexts, civil society has three roles. First is civil society as associational life. Edwards sees this as the creation and participation in voluntary associations, and they serve as the "gene carriers" (p.18) for passing down values and virtues from one generation to the next, and teaching lessons on what how to be involved in democracy (2004). Second, civil society serves to produce a "good society" (Edwards,

2004, pp. 37). This means it fosters adherence to positive norms and values, and emphasizes activities that are geared towards promoting positive social and political goals. Also, a good society is one in which social equality and justice are valorized (Skelly, 2009). And third role of a civil society is as the public sphere (Edwards, 2004). In this role, civil society provides a public sphere where citizens can debate with one another and learn how to negotiate an evolving sense of the common and public interest. Howard (2002) writes that civil society in the public sphere serves to teach citizens the habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness, and practical skills necessary to partake in public life.

But despite the stated commitment to a democracy transformation in the Kyrgyz Republic immediately after independence, it has not gained traction. According to Freedom House reports (2016), the Kyrgyz Republic became steadily less democratic between 1997 and 2009, was labeled a "Not Free" nation in 2009, and has been “Partly Free” ever since. Many blame this slide on the failure to establish a civil society in which citizens are engaged (Anderson, 2000; Cokgezen, 2004; Heyneman, 2004; Huskey, 2010; Kuchukeeva & O’Loughlin, 2003; Nichol, 2010; Petric, 2008).

Howard (2002) identifies two commonalities of all former Soviet Republics that helps explain why civil society and democracy have not developed in Kyrgyz Republic. First is a mistrust of organizations on the part of the citizens (Howard, 2002). The communist regimes tried to eliminate all forms of independent group activity and mandated participation in intricately organized state-run organizations. The negative experiences the citizens had with such organizations have resulted in a continued mistrust of all organizations and has prohibited citizens from getting involved. And second is the

persistence and reliance upon close friendship and family networks (Howard, 2002). These networks were the only places where Soviet citizens could openly and safely discuss ideas, and they were relied upon for existence in a shortage economy. Ideally, the personal relationships in civil society are comprised of weak ties that span relatively heterogeneous segments of society rather than strong ties and closed networks (Gibson, 2001). Howard (2002) writes that the strong, closed personal networks formed during the Soviet times are still present today and give citizens no compunction to join civil society organizations. Gibson (2001) says the existence of expansive social networks may be the most important precursor to the development of effective and autonomous democratic political organizations. And this is problematic for the development of civil society in Kyrgyz Republic, as the social structure there still revolves around loyalty to kinship networks (Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003).

Kuchukeeva and O'Loughlin (2003) support the notion that the existence of strong, closed personal networks, and other legacies of the Soviet social system hamper the development of civil society in Kyrgyz Republic. Civil societies ideally have an underlying sense of generalized reciprocity and communal ties that are horizontally structured (Gibson, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) operationalizes generalized reciprocity as "I'll do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road" (p. 21). And organizations are horizontal in that they consist of overlapping networks of people and members have equal status and opportunities to contribute.

But the ethos of the Soviet Union that was handed down to Kyrgyz Republic is that "collectivism reflected the spirit of unity, equality, solidarity, and altruism, whereas

individualism threatened deviance. Individual idiosyncrasies and initiatives had to be sacrificed in the name of the collective" (Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003, p. 560). Thus, Kuchukeeva and O'Loughlin, two political geographers who conducted important research on civic engagement and democratic consolidation in the Kyrgyz Republic, conclude that the social structure there is mostly vertical, weak and fragmented, and devoid of a sense of generalized reciprocity (, 2003).

In a study to determine the levels of civic engagement in a post-communist state (not Kyrgyz Republic), Mondak and Gearing (1998) identified other impediments to the development of civil society in Kyrgyz Republic. One is that free and open political discussion was forbidden in the Soviet Union, so the citizens are not well-versed or practiced on such matters. And where there is no examination of opposing political views, there is little voiced opposition. The second impediment is the presence of a weak local media. Most local media outlets are partisan vehicles with little or no professional journalistic training and standards. Mondak and Gearing's study (1998) found that this type of media tends to intensify social divisions, as opposed to promoting civil society. And the third impediment is Soviet-style housing complexes the citizens continue to live in:

> many citizens reside in rather grim look-alike high-rise apartment buildings, not single family dwellings. These building were built when concern with aesthetics were cast aside because of the more pragmatic need to house new residents as quickly and efficiently as possible. Neighborhoods have little in the way of identifying characteristics. (Mondak & Gearing, 1998, p. 620)

Mondak and Gearing write that the organization of people into relatively homogenous, diffuse neighborhoods and living structures discourages civic engagement amongst its residents. This type of housing is common in all parts of Kyrgyz Republic.

And though many have written about the lack of civil society in Kyrgyz Republic and other post-Soviet states, others contend that civil society exists there, just not one that fits into the western, neo-liberal conception of it (Anderson, 2000; Babajanian, Frasier, & Stevens, 2005; Earle, 2005; Narozhna, 2004; Roy, 2002). Neo-liberal civil society refers to the non-profit sector that is independent from the state, but is able to assume the role of the provider of certain services (Earle, 2005). Babajanian et al (2005) call the neo-liberal version of civil society one that was conceived in the west as a political project where activists are engaged in advocacy and lobbying. Babajanian et al (2005) write:

> members of a neo-liberal civil society have the right to vote and to serve in public office; participation in public affairs is institutionalised. It is also voluntary. Citizens are engaged in civil society independent of state, family and community bonds. Participation cannot be imposed either by birth or awesome ritual. (p. 211)

Further, the neo-liberal conceptualization is believed to have the potential to encourage the reduction of state power and contribute to the liberalization of social service provisions (Babajanian et al, 2005).

Roy (2002) critiques that the neo-liberal conceptualization of civil society does not and should not be made to fit into the context of the post-Soviet states. He writes:

> in the conceptualization based on Western ideas of political and economic freedom, civil society has to be created from scratch in Central Asia. This is either because there is [assumed to be] nothing of value today upon which to build, or because there is no such thing as traditional civil society in Central Asia, owing to the onslaught of the Soviet system on previous social structures. (Roy, 2002, p. 125)

Roy points out that Central Asian states are endowed with an "immense social fabric" (Roy, 2002, p. 125), which consists of strong familial and community networks, as well as traditional forms of community involvement, management, and positions of authority and responsibility. Roy argues that these traditional institutions should not be ignored when analyzing whether or not civil society exists in Central Asia.

Babajanian, Frezier, and Stevens (2005) label this traditional structure as communal civil society. Communal civil society has its roots in the pre-Soviet breakup, and it builds upon the traditions of mutual aid and localized decision making. Also, it is more concerned with the relations within a community, with community solidarity and self-help than with state relations. Defined, communal civil society is "a sphere of social interaction where people come together on a voluntary basis, along interest lines, to exchange information, deliberate about collective action, and define public opinion" (Babajanian et al, 2005, p. 213).

Without the presence of the neo-liberal conception of civil society, however, the Kyrgyz government has largely been unable to create the necessary institutions that form the foundation of democratic societies (Anderson, Pomfret, & Usseinova, 2004). Examples of such institutions that necessarily underpin a democratic society that are

lacking in Kyrgyz Republic are a free and independent judiciary, a free press, and a general adherence by the people and organizations to a rule of law (Huskey, 2010).

Because of the Kyrgyz government's early commitment to becoming a democratic nation, support has come from democratic nations like the United States (Anderson, 1999). One form of that support has been a commitment to international education exchange programs. Through the auspices Freedom for Russian and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act (FSA) of 1992, international education exchange programs have been established that bring high school undergraduate, and graduate students from all former Soviet republics to study in the U.S. (Yazdani, 2007). The UGRAD program in Kyrgyz Republic, which is studied here, is one example of several international exchange programs that were created as a result of the FSA. Sharing a similar mission as most governmentally funded international exchange programs, the UGRAD program is designed to help the Kyrgyz Republic by contributing to its economic and democratic reform process and by promoting mutual understanding of the United States and Kyrgyz Republic through a study abroad exchange activity (Aguirre, 2003).

An understanding of civil society and the promotion of democratic ideals are listed as two of the objectives of the UGRAD program. But despite its past as a republic of the Soviet Union, the people of the Kyrgyz Republic seem to have the sense that there is power invested in the hands of its citizens (Collins, 2011). For support, one need not look any further than to fact that in 2005, and again in 2010, after incumbent Presidents blatantly rigged elections to maintain their position (Huskey, 2010), the citizens managed to come together to overthrow the "elected" Presidents through protests and

demonstrations. First, in 2005, it was President Askar Akayev who as unseated. Akayev, the first and only President the Kyrgyz Republic ever knew up to that point, was overthrown in a bloodless coup that came to be known as the Tulip Revolution (Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007). And then in 2010, Akayev's successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was ousted. Bakiyev's ouster was not as peaceful as the Tulip Revolution, though, and close to 100 people lost their lives in the demonstrations and conflicts (Huskey, 2010). In both circumstances, the Kyrgyz people became tired of the increasingly unfair and authoritarian rule of their President and managed to topple their regimes.

The ability of the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic both to popularly elect and overthrow two Presidents demonstrates that they, in their own emic context, have a semblance of civic engagement and that some democratic ideals have taken root (Collins, 2011). But these actions do not show that the citizens are fully cognizant of what it means to be part of a democratic nation. In other words, while civic engagement is an important element in a democratic nation, it does not insure democracy (Mondak & Gearing, 1998; Anderson, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003). The emic concept of democracy in the Kyrgyz Republic does not appear to go beyond the selection and removal of officials from political offices. For once the leaders are elected, there are few elements of other necessary democratic institutions that can prevent leaders from the use of overtly undemocratic actions to maintain their political power and build their personal wealth (Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007; Nichol, 2010; Collins, 2011).

And while the early attempts at establishing a democratic nation at the onset of independence led to some initial success, that progress has not been sustained (Nichol, 2010). According to the Freedom House "Freedom in the world" report (2016), the

Kyrgyz Republic became an increasingly less democratic nation every year but one between 1997 and 2009. The only year during that span that elements of democracy did not diminish was 2005, which happened to be the year Akayev was overthrown; but even then, the overall democracy score only improved from 5.67 to 5.64 (Freedom House, 2016). In fact, that minute gain in democratization was completely eradicated by 2009, when the Freedom House's designation for Kyrgyz Republic was downgraded from "Partly-Free," which it had been since 1997, to "Not free" (Freedom House, 2016). The rating did increase back to “Partly Free” in 2010, and has remained so up to this time.

Summary

The research literature reviewed here has identified several valid rationales for the U.S. government to fund international education exchange programs. Important rationales include culture relations theory, which is the notion that U.S. security (i.e. economic, military, political, etc.) is enhanced by its ability to win the hearts and minds of people from other countries, and the notion that increased mutual cultural understanding is a major detriment to costly and destructive wars. Due to these rationales, the U.S. government has enacted several important pieces of legislation that enable and often fund formalized international exchange programs. One such piece of legislation is the FREEDOM Support Act of 1991, which created the UGRAD program that is studied here. UGRAD, a study abroad program for college students from the former Soviet republics, is designed to develop leaders to help the nations in their transitions to democratic, free-market states. From the research literature, we found several specific components of study abroad programs that are known to promote the development of intercultural competence, but nothing that examines how or why

participants of U.S. funded international education exchange programs meet the program objectives. Therefore, an important question that guides this research project is how do the factors related to the development of intercultural competence on a study abroad program influence the achievement of UGRAD program objectives?

The primary conceptual model used in this study is Stephenson's Thematic Triad (2002), which posits there are certain variables in three distinct themes that produce ideal conditions for cultural deepening, which is an ideal condition for the development of intercultural competence for study abroad program participants. Though there is much empirical evidence to support the variables Stephenson includes, the Thematic Triad is lacking two crucial variables that have also been proven to promote the development of intercultural competence. The two missing variables are elements of experiential learning and the presence of cultural mentors.

And finally, the presence of a vibrant civil society underpins democratic environments. However, the civil society in the former Soviet republics is communal and characterized by networks with thick ties and closed groups, and therefore different than the neo-liberal style of civil society, which is weak ties and heterogeneous groups, that UGRAD participants experienced in the U.S.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

This chapter provides an outline of the research design used for this study. The chapter includes a rationale for the type of research methodology used, as well as descriptions of both the data collection and data analysis methods. Also, the limitations of this research will also be examined. To reiterate, the purpose of the study is to determine which factors influence the achievement of program objectives for U.S. governmentally sponsored international education exchange programs, as perceived by the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic. The UGRAD program objectives examined as part of this study are:

1) Promote mutual cultural understanding;
2) Empower the UGRAD alumni to be agents of change in their home countries;
3) Give participants an understanding of important elements of civil society so they can espouse those values at home;
4) Generate enduring ties with Americans from the program;
5) Improve participants' professional development skills (Aguirre, 2003).

Therefore, the principal research question that guides this study is what are the factors that influence the attainment of UGRAD program objectives, as perceived by the alumni?

Mixed Methods Research Design

This study employed a mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Creswell (2014) defines mixed methods research as an approach to inquiry that combines both quantitative and qualitative forms of research, involves philosophical assumptions from both forms, and mixes or integrates both approaches in a study. The use of mixed methods dates back to 1959, when Campbell and Fisk

introduced "multi-operationalism," or the use of more than one method, to validate research findings (Bouchard, 1976, p. 268). The use of mixed methods design has grown considerably since then and is now considered the third major research paradigm (Johnson et al., 2007). A rationale for using mixed methods, as opposed to only quantitative or qualitative, is "the limitations of one method can be offset by the strengths of the other method, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative data provide a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach by itself" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p. 8). In mixed methods, the qualitative information compliments the quantitative information, which allows for a richer interpretation of a phenomenon (Powell et al., 2008).

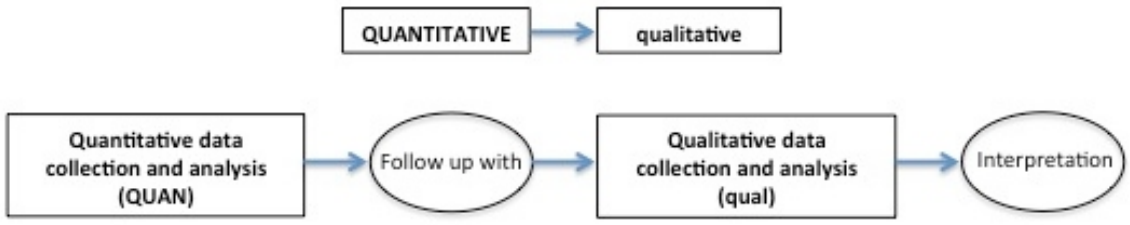
Elements of a retrospective tracer study (Bok & Bowen, 1998; Hornby & Symon, 1994; ILO, 2011; Paige et al., 2009; Pang, 1975) method were also used. Retrospective tracer studies represent a systematic attempt to study and follow-up those who have experienced various training or educational experiences (Dejaeghere & Fry, 2003). Retrospective tracer studies are an inquiry approach at a single point in time that can generate data on an already achieved impact (ILO, 2011). This is deemed to be an appropriate choice for this study, as it is an attempt to understand the impact that participation in the UGRAD program has had on the lives of the participants. Another rationale for employing the tracer study method is that the study works with only UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic, not the entire worldwide population of UGRAD alumni. Amartunga et al. (2002) writes that tracer studies are best when dealing with a subgroup of the larger population, as opposed to an entire population. While the findings of this tracer study are not generalizable to the whole population of world-wide

UGRAD participants, it does provide deep, rich information that helps us better understand some of the alumni's experiences as they have unfolded across time (Hornby & Symon, 1994). It should also be noted that this study only examined the experiences of UGRAD participants who were in the program prior to 2011. An important aspect of this study relates to participants meeting UGRAD program objectives, so it was deemed necessary to include only participants who have had sufficient time after their UGRAD experience to meet the program objectives.

Explanatory Sequential Method

The mixed methods approach used is an explanatory sequential method, which has a prescribed, two-phase sequence. Quantitative data were gathered and then analyzed in the first phase, followed by collection and analysis of the qualitative data in the second (Creswell, 2014). This sequence allowed the researcher to sketch a good picture of the results with the quantitative data, then use the qualitative data to explain the general picture further through the use of rich descriptions (Creswell, 2008). As indicated by "QUANTITATIVE" and "qualitative" depiction in Figure 6, the quantitative data were weighed more heavily than the qualitative data in explanatory sequential method, as quantitative data were used both to provide the general picture of the research results, and

Figure 6
Explanatory Sequential Method



Source: Creswell, 2014, p. 220

to inform the choices and content for the secondary qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014). To illustrate, the people chosen to participate in the qualitative data collection were based on a maximum variation sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002), which means quantitative data were used to identify individuals for the qualitative portion of the study because they presented a wide range of experiences in the program and outcomes afterward. Also, the topics explored in the qualitative interviews were determined based on the findings through quantitative data collection and analysis.

An important consideration in mixed methods research is how and when the quantitative data are integrated with the qualitative. In the explanatory sequential method, both forms of data are connected in the data analysis of the first phase, and the data collection of the second (Creswell, 2014). As will be described in more detail later, the results of the quantitative data analysis were used here to select qualitative interview participants, and then used to provide a framework for the content to be discussed in the interview protocol.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data for this study were collected via the Kyrgyz UGRAD Alumni Questionnaire (KUAQ) developed by the researcher (Appendix B). The KUAQ is an online, self-administered questionnaire for UGRAD program alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic about their experience before, during, and after their participation (Fink, 2002). The KUAQ has a series of questions related to various program factors and objectives of the UGRAD program. KUAQ questions obtained some categorical data, some ordinal data through the use of a 4-point forced-choice response scale, and some qualitative data through a few open-ended questions. The KUAQ was designed with

Dillman's (2002) suggestions for consideration of the computer literacy, technological abilities, and English language skills in mind. As the majority of research subjects accessed the questionnaire from the Kyrgyz Republic using mobile devices, the KUAQ was created to require very little bandwidth, and was simplified to ensure cross-platform compatibility. Respondents were ensured confidentiality, but the questionnaire was not anonymous, as it was necessary to validate the authenticity of responses and to monitor the overall response rate.

Instrumentation

The Kyrgyz UGRAD Alumni Questionnaire (KUAQ) utilized Qualtrics software, and consists of 75 items, each designed to elicit information pertaining to one of the various aspects of the study under investigation (see Table 3). Questions 1-15 are categorical in nature, and provide demographic information about the individual respondents. Questions 16-70 are a series of questions pertaining to each element of the Thematic Triad and five UGRAD program objectives. Using the 4-point forced-choice response scale questions, each series of questions was designed to obtain a composite quantitative measure of the respondents in relation to each of the Thematic Triad areas and five UGRAD program objectives. The questions pertaining to the Thematic Triad measured the participant's cultural deepening in each of the three areas (Stephenson, 2002). Higher scores in each Thematic Triad area represent more cultural deepening on the part of the alumnus. The questions about UGRAD program objectives measured the degree to which the alumni reported their progress toward achievement of each objective. Again, higher scores in each of the five objective section represent a higher degree of self-reported progress toward program objectives. The KUAQ concludes with four

Table 3
Kyrgyz UGRAD Alumni Questionnaire (KUAQ)

Topic	Question numbers
Demographic information	1-15
Thematic Triad area 1: Personal characteristics	16-26
Thematic Triad area 2: Host country characteristics compared to home country	27-35
Thematic Triad area 3: Program characteristics	36-45
UGRAD Objective 1: Promote mutual cultural understanding	46-50
UGRAD Objective 2: Empower alumni to be agents of change in their home countries	51-55
UGRAD Objective 3: Give participants understanding of civil society so they can espouse those values at home	56-60
UGRAD Objective 4: Generate enduring ties with Americans from the program	61-65
UGRAD Objective 5: Improve participants' skills in the areas of professional development	66-70
Open ended qualitative questions	71-75

optional, open-ended, qualitative questions (71-74). These questions allowed participants to respond freely to the questions in order to add any additional information about the program that they felt is important to understanding their experience (Paige et al., 2010).

The final question (75) asks respondents if they are willing to participate the second phase of qualitative depth interviews.

Prior to distribution, the KUAQ and interview protocol were piloted using a group of UGRAD students from the Kyrgyz Republic who participated in the program in between 2012 and 2014. The purpose of piloting the KUAQ was to establish content validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Radhakrishna, 2007; Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Addressing the following questions with the pilot group ensured validity for the questionnaire:

1) Does the KUAQ measure what it intends to measure?
2) Does it accurately represent the content of the study?
3) Are the questions appropriate for the population of the study?
4) Is it sufficiently comprehensive in order to address the purpose of the study? (Radhakrishna, 2007)

The pilot group was asked to take the KUAQ and provide written comments on the questions and content. Their information was then used to make any necessary changes to the questionnaire. In addition, the interview protocol was administered to a small sample of pilot group participants. Like the KUAQ, the piloting of the interview protocol was used to gather feedback on the interview protocol questions and the appropriateness of the questions.

After the modifications to the KUAQ were made, a systematic attempt to contact as many Kyrgyz Republic UGRAD alumni as possible was made. This outreach was done in three ways. First, a complete list of all the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic was obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request to the U.S. State

Department, and a search was done to contact all those people directly through social media sites like Facebook, VKontakte, and LinkedIn. The alumni found through the social media search were sent the Contact Letter (Appendix C). The Contact Letter explains the nature of the research project, and asks if they are willing to take the questionnaire. The Invitation Letter (Appendix D), which contains concrete instruction on how to take the KUAQ, was then sent to all who replied to the initial Contact Letter.

Second, in order to contact the alumni who were not identified through social media sites search, a Request Letter (Appendix E) was sent to the people involved in several email listservs and groups for people who are, or have been, involved in the Kyrgyz Republic. Examples of such lists are currently serving Peace Corps Volunteers, U.S. State Department exchange program alumni, and the "Friends of Kyrgyzstan" not-for-profit group. The Request Letter was sent through these various channels asking members to share information about the research project with any Kyrgyz Republic UGRAD alumni they know. Those who did know UGRAD alumni were asked to contact them in order to share the information about the questionnaire, or they were asked to share with me the alumni's contact information. Once alumni were identified this way, again, the Contact Letter was sent to them, then after contact had been made, the Invitation Letter was sent.

For the third outreach attempt, the UGRAD alumni who had been reached were encouraged to share the invitation to participate with any other UGRAD alumni they know. When alumni were identified through other alumni, the same process of Contact Letter and Invitation Letter were sent.

The process of gathering the KUAQ lasted approximately two calendar months, during which time multiple, repeated attempts through the aforementioned channels were made to contact alumni and encourage their participation. The desired response rate for the online questionnaire was a minimum 30 percent, which Punch (2003) deems appropriate for an online questionnaire. However, an exact response rate is not possible to report here due to the presence of an ambiguous denominator in calculating the rate. One way to report the response rate achieved for this research is 42 percent, as 72 of the 171 UGRAD participants from the Kyrgyz Republic between 1993 and 2011 participated in the research project. However, the researcher was able to connect with 73 of the 171 participants, and all but one of those who were in contact agreed to complete the KUAQ. Of the 98 UGRAD alumni whom the researcher was not able to make contact with and did not participate in the research, it is not possible to ascertain if their non-participation was due to an unwillingness to participate, outdated contact information (e.g., non-active social media page, old email address, etc.), or something else. Therefore, the denominator in calculating an exact response rate is ambiguous, so it is reasonable to believe the 42 percent undervalues the actual response rate.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis followed the six steps suggested by Creswell (2014). Step one is to report basic information about the population of the respondents and the response rate. The majority of this information is presented in the form of a table. Step one also includes information about the effect that the nonresponses may have had on the data. Step two is to discuss the method by which response bias will be accounted for. Step three is to provide a descriptive analysis of the data. This includes

data for the independent and dependent variables, as well information on the range, mean, and standard deviation for the variables. The KUAQ was designed to produce a quantitative value for each respondent for each of the three independent and five dependent variables in order to analyze their experiences in relation to the independent variables (i.e., Thematic Triad) and dependent variables (i.e., progress towards program objectives). On the KUAQ, each variable had a series of four-point Likert scale questions related to it, so responses to the questions within each variable produced a value of one to four. The values from all the questions within each variable were then averaged out to produce the quantitative value for each respondent for each variable. These were the data used for the descriptive analysis.

Step four is information on the reliability checks for internal consistency for the instrument used to gather the data. A coefficient alpha statistic was used to accomplish this. To calculate the coefficient alpha statistics, the data pertaining to the questions within each of the eight variables were analyzed as eight individual scales. A coefficient alpha score of .7 was deemed to be desirable (Huck, 2012).

Step five is the presentation of the inferential statistics. SPSS was used for this study, and the statistical tests used were Pearson product moment correlations to ascertain the bivariate relationship among the different variables and multiple regression to test the relationship between the multiple program factors and outcome variables. Again, the quantitative values assigned to each KUAQ respondent in relation to each of the independent and dependent variables were used for these analyses. And finally, step six is a presentation and interpretation of the quantitative data. This step includes discussion

on whether or not the tests' findings were statistically significant, results of the hypothesis tests, and an explanation of why the results may have occurred.

Qualitative Data Collection

Interview participants were selected using a maximum variation sampling strategy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002). Maximum variation is the selection of participants from a population based on their variations in relation to UGRAD experiences and program outcomes. Maximum variation sampling is an attempt to identify and describe how the central themes of the research occur across a variety of participant experience (Patton, 2002). In this study, the UGRAD alumni chosen for qualitative interviews were those who demonstrated through KUAQ results the widest range of scores in relation to the Thematic Triad and progress towards meeting UGRAD program objectives. Patton (2002) writes that maximum variation sampling is an especially effective strategy for selecting participants from within a single program because it allows the researcher "to more thoroughly describe the variation in the group and to understand variations in experience while also investigating core elements and shared outcomes" (p. 172).

Participants were selected for the qualitative portion of the study until a point of data saturation was achieved (Mason, 2010), which is the point where the collection of additional data did not add any new insight into the topic being investigated. Guest et al. (2006) suggest that a full range of variability is presented, and data saturation occurs for qualitative studies at approximately12 interviews. Twelve is considered an adequate number assuming that the interviews are semi-structured, the interviews are conducted independently of each other, and the population is relatively homogenous (Guest et al.,

2006). These criteria were assured by employing one-on-one interviews, using an interview protocol, with a relatively homogenous group, given that all are UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic.

The participants of the qualitative data collection portion of the study were given conversational, in-depth online interviews, using Skype or a similar communication platform whenever possible. When participants did not have an adequate Internet connection, the interview was conducted by telephone. When using Skype, the video camera function was turned off to ensure that the interview experience is similar to a telephone interview. Qualitative interviews begin from the ontological position that "people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore" (Mason, 2002, p. 63). As qualitative depth interviews are a "partnership, communicative performance, and conversational journey" (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, p. 92) between the researcher and participant, this data collection method was deemed an ideal way to connect with UGRAD alumni in order to understand their experience.

A key feature of the in-depth interviews is the actual relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. King (1994) writes that the relationship is an actual part of the research process, not a distraction from it. The partnerships between the researcher and each participant will be created in such a way that multiple understandings, roles, and identities each person plays beyond that of interviewer and interviewee are understood, recognized, and validated. Also, an understanding of the motivations each has for conducting the interview will be established, as well (Myrdal, 1969). Inherent in a

qualitative interview is an understanding that the interviewer's own epistemological position during the interview process can have a large impact on the data that is complied. Mason (2002) writes that knowledge can often be constructed, as opposed to excavated, through the interview process, so it is important for a researcher to understand their own ability to affect the data generated from a qualitative interviews.

Recognition that the in-depth interview process is a partnership symbolizes that both participants are actively involved in the process of making meaning from the experience (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, p. 92). The in-depth interview is a communicative performance in the sense that an important context of the interview is the actual communication and/or discourse itself (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). All verbal exchanges are subject to different reactions and interpretations, so the interviewer must perform in a way that they can understand the multiple contexts at play. And the performance aspect helps to move along the conversational journey, as it pertains to the shifting of communicative norms, interview protocols, and improvisation that may be required to maintain the structure of the interview. In short, Miller and Crabtree (1999) describe the in-depth interview as a "situated, encapsulated discourse balancing intimacy and distance, which opens the way to understanding how particular individuals arrive at cognitions, emotions, and values that emerge from the conversational journey" (p. 106).

To guide the qualitative, conversational in-depth interviews, an interview protocol was created and used. A protocol is a representation of the framework of the study, not a list of actual questions, and is used to guide the conversation (Yin, 2011). The conversational style of interviewing requires the interviewer to be an active listener, and to be willing to allow the interview to go in directions that make the participant

comfortable and confident. At the same time, they must be able to maintain some semblance of structure in order to gather data relevant to the research questions. The protocol contained a small subset of topics relevant to the study's central research question, and was garnered from the analysis of the quantitative data.

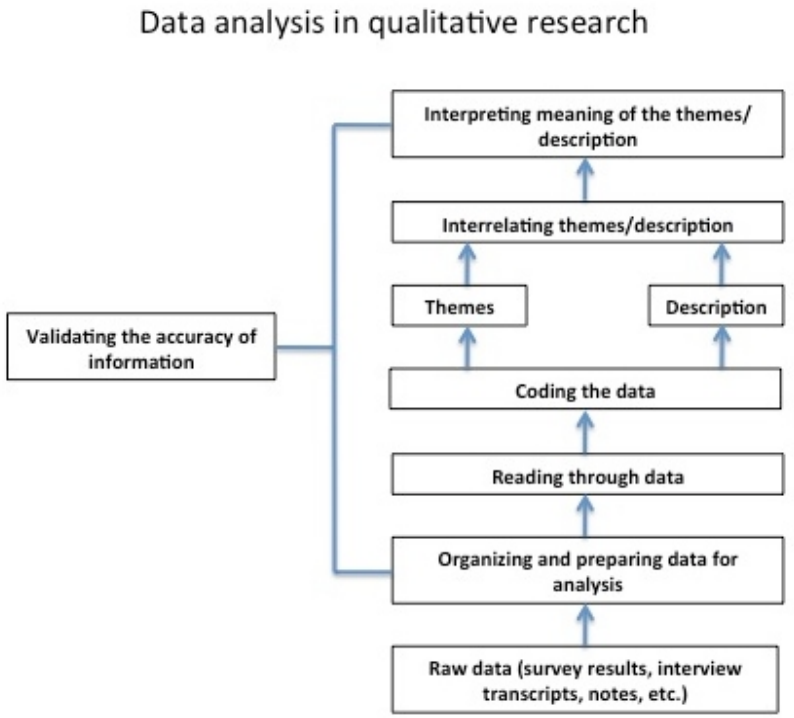
All in-depth interviews were audio taped with the participant's approval and transcribed in order to ensure confirmability. Confirmability is the degree to which the results of a study can be confirmed by others (Crabtree, 2006; Hatfield, 2013). All interviewees were given an opportunity to member-check the transcript of their interview, which allowed them to correct any mistakes and elaborate on items they felt were not described well.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze the data that were generated, a six-step hierarchical approach (Figure 7) was used (Creswell, 2014). The steps are hierarchical in the sense that they are sequential and they build on the outcomes from the previous steps, but they are also interactive and not necessarily accomplished in the order presented (Creswell, 2014). In addition, each phase is subject to an ongoing process of authentication, in which some steps may have to be repeated as new ideas and possibilities come to light.

The first step of the analysis process is to prepare the accumulated data for analysis (Creswell, 2014). This includes tabling all of the questionnaire information, transcribing all of the conducted interviews, and typing up any field notes. The second step is to read through all of the prepared data in order to "obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (Creswell, 2014, p. 185).

Figure 7
Data Analysis in Qualitative Research



Source: Creswell, 2014, p. 197

The third step is the coding of the information (Creswell, 2014). Coding is the act of breaking up the information into pieces before any meaning is ascribed to it. Maxwell (2005) writes that coding is done to "fracture the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category" (p. 96). Step four, then, is to categorize the coded data into two categories – description and themes (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive data category includes that which contains a rendering of information about the people, situations, events, and interactions. The data categorized as descriptive is that which serves as the basis for illustrative cases which demonstrate the findings of the research that will be included in Chapter 4. The data categorized as themes are those that contain ideas and topics that are presented from multiple

perspectives and can be supported by evidence and quotations. Creswell (2014) points out that strong qualitative studies use both the data from themes and description to build multiple layers of complex analysis. He writes "sophisticated qualitative studies go beyond description and theme identification and into complex theme connections" (2014, pg. 200).

Step five is the process of transitioning identified descriptions and themes into an eventual presentation of the findings (Creswell, 2014). This often takes the form of a chronology of the analysis process, a visual representation of the findings, sometime in the form of a process model, or a narrative passage to convey that findings of the analysis (Creswell, 2014). Step six, the final step, is an interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). This part summarizes what was learned from the data, as well as link the findings to the existing literature already examined in Chapter 2. Creswell (2014) also says this is a time to pose new questions that the findings raised.

The concepts of validity and generalizability, which are the hallmarks of positivistic, quantitative research, do not have similar equivalencies in qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007; Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2011). Validity and generalizability are possible within the confines of objective research; qualitative research, which is more subjective, strives to achieve deep understanding and insight (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007). Gibbs (2007) argues that reliability is accomplished when the researcher checks the accuracy for the findings through multiple triangulated procedures. And particularity is the assurance that the descriptions and themes developed are particular to the context of the research (Creswell,

2014). Yin (2011) provides a list of strategies that were employed in this study to ensure reliability and particularity. They are:

1) the use of rich data in order to cover completely the detailed and varied data;
2) respondent validation in order to obtain feedback from the research participants, which will lessen the chance of misrepresentation of self-reported data;
3) search for discrepant evidence and negative cases in order to test alternate explanations or hypotheses; and
4) triangulation, or the collection and analysis of evidence from multiple sources (Yin, 2011, p. 79)

The use of these four strategies in this study helped ensure that the conclusions drawn from the generated data were reliable, particular, and qualitatively valid (Creswell, 2014).

Myself as Researcher

Boyatzis (1998) writes that all qualitative research is subjective, and as such, the researcher's disposition towards their topic will affect their ability to conduct thematic analysis, and that a tolerance for ambiguity is necessary trait. Myrdal (1969) writes that when scientists do not make their viewpoints clear, their research is subject to certain biases. He writes a researcher's social conditioning plays an important role in "the approaches we choose in research, by which I mean the concepts, models, and theories we use, and the way in which we select and arrange our observations and present the results of our research" (Myrdal, 1969, p. 49). Thus, it is necessary for me to be explicit here about my experience and potential biases in regard to this research subject.

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic from 1997 to 1999. While there, I met several of the first UGRAD program participants. From my interactions with

them, I recognized that those who sought out the U.S. Americans living in the Kyrgyz Republic, were positive and enthusiastic about their UGRAD experience, and were very involved in exchange alumni activities. But these happy alumni also told tales of other alumni who either did not have positive experiences or were not adjusting well back into life in the Kyrgyz Republic. I was even told, anecdotally, that there were alumni who committed suicide upon their return from the program. Further, of the many UGRAD alumni I spoke to, most harbored dreams of living permanently in the U.S., with the connections and resources to accomplish the dream. These factors led me to question the *value* of the UGRAD program for both the nations and individuals involved. My question was "does the program benefit the Krygyz Republic by promoting democracy and civil society in the Krygyz Republic?" Is it a program that takes the best and brightest of the country and either opens the door for them to leave or crushes their spirit? I remain deeply interested in these questions, but obtaining answers to them are out of the scope of possibility for this research project. Therefore, this research project was designed to illuminate the path for further inquiries on these questions.

Since my Peace Corps experience, I have administered international education programs at higher education institutions in the U.S. In my role working with international students, like those in the UGRAD program, I have seen individuals flounder and excel in almost equal numbers. From my experience, I developed the hypothesis that international students who have a higher degree of intercultural competence are the ones who have the most rewarding experiences in the U.S. Therefore, I believe that I, as an administrator, have the ability to give these students

information, support, and guidance that can have a large impact on their experience while in the U.S.

In short, I have seen students on both sides of the international education experience. With the UGAD alumni I have met, they can be either well-adjusted and demonstrate the types of skills the program wants, or they can be less enthusiastic and rather detached from their experience. And in the U.S., I have seen students who adjust and perform well, and I have seen students who do not. What I do not know is whether or how these are related? In other words, are the UGRAD alumni who do well once they return home and demonstrate the objectives of the program the ones who did well in the U.S., or are they the one who had a difficult time there? Further, as an administrator, I want to know what I can do to ensure these students (specifically those in the UGRAD program) meet the program objectives. These perspectives form the basis of my research and set the context for myself as a researcher.

Limitations

Despite the efforts to design a research project that produces reliable information, there are some limitations to the study. First, is the fact that the majority of the research was conducted from the United States with people who were in the Kyrgyz Republic. While technology has made communication between the U.S. and Kyrgyz Republic much easier now than when I lived there 14 years ago, Internet access is still not readily available outside of the major cities. Given this reality, there were a large number of UGRAD alumni I was not able to reach. This establishes one form of respondent bias, as the majority of respondents were those with Internet access living in larger cities. This

made it difficult to incorporate the views and experiences of those who are living in smaller towns and villages outside the main urban areas in this study.

Another form of respondent bias that may be present was due to the likelihood that the alumni who are not meeting UGRAD program objectives may have participated at a lower level than those who are. Given this bias, it may not have been possible to truly identify the full range of alumni experiences. In addition, the study is likely unable to provide illustrative examples of those who do not perceive positive benefits from their UGRAD experience.

Another limitation in conducting the majority of research from the U.S. was the use of online software programs or telephone to conduct the qualitative interviews. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is an important part of the research process, as is the ability to create a partnership. These efforts are somewhat compromised in a remote interview setting. During the communicative performance as part of the interview (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), non-verbal cues were more difficult to identify and interpret over the Internet of telephone.. Important aspects of the qualitative data may have been missed.

And finally, as the study is both retrospective and perceptual, the respondents self-reported their own experiences and outcomes. Fadnes et al. (2008) identifies seven different sources of potential bias when conducting research with self-reported data. Three such sources were applicable here. First is recall period, which means that accuracy can decrease over time. Since some of the UGRAD alumni participated in their program nearly 25 years ago, some details of their experience may have been reported inaccurately. Second is selective recall, or the fact that some events may have been

easier to recall than others. This potential source of bias may have manifested itself in that alumni may have been overly positive or negative about their experience, as their narratives may have evolved over time since they participated in the program. And the third is social desirability, or the intent of the respondent to give answers that are deemed socially desirable. In the context of this study, respondents may have wanted to give the impression that success in UGRAD objectives is desirable, and in order to give a socially desirable answer, the truth may be have been stretched.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors which influence the achievement objectives of a governmentally-sponsored international exchange program. The use of a mixed methods retrospective tracer study approach for this project was ideal, because it allowed for a quantitative examination of UGRAD participants' outcomes from a group-wide perspective, and for a qualitative examination of the details of select individuals' experiences through their own important stories and narratives. It is hoped that the rich and robust information obtained by these mixed methods will assist all who work with these types of exchanges. The information will help those who either administer governmentally-sponsored exchange programs or host participating exchange students on U.S. campuses to make administrative and/or programming choices which will help ensure that the programs accomplish what they aim to do, and that participants receive the proper training and support to have meaningful, mutually-beneficial experiences, both during and after their participation.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors which influence the achievement of program objectives for U.S. governmentally sponsored international education exchange programs, as perceived by the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic. The primary research question is what are the factors related to the attainment of UGRAD program objectives, as perceived by the alumni? Additional research questions that underpin this study are:

To conduct this research, an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was used (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010), with elements of a retrospective tracer study (Bok & Bowen, 1998; Hornby & Symon, 1994; ILO, 2011; Paige et al., 2009; Pang, 1975). First, the Kyrgyz UGRAD Alumni Questionnaire (KUAQ) was completed online by UGRAD alumni from Kyrgyz Republic who the researcher was able to contact, and who agreed to take the survey. The quantitative data collected from the KUAQ were analyzed, and from that, a group of respondents were chosen for qualitative interviews using maximum variation sampling. The data collected from the qualitative interviews were then analyzed and used to address the research question.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The KUAQ contains questions designed to gather information in nine different areas. The first series of questions were categorical in nature, and were designed to gather information about the respondents pertaining to their lives both before and after their UGRAD experience. The next series of questions were designed to give respondents a self-reported composite score for their cultural deepening in each area of

the revised Thematic Triad (Stephenson, 2002). These three scores were used as the independent variables in the study. The final series of questions were designed to give respondents a self-reported composite score on their progress towards meeting five of the UGRAD program objectives. These five scores were used as the dependent variables in the study.

Respondents' Profile

UGRAD was first implemented in 1993, and through the 2010-2011 academic year, there were 171 participants from the Kyrgyz Republic. Of that group, the researcher was able to contact 73 people, 72 of whom were willing to complete the Kyrgyz UGRAD Alumni Questionnaire (KUAQ). The goal for this research project was a 30% response rate (Punch, 2003); an estimated 42% response rate was achieved (though for reasons detailed in Chapter 3, an ambivalent denominator makes the reporting of an exact response rate impossible). Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents according to the years they participated in the program. There was at least one respondent from each yearly cohort, but as can be seen, survey participation was greater among cohorts that were in the U.S. more recently.

Table 4
Respondents' Year in UGRAD Participation

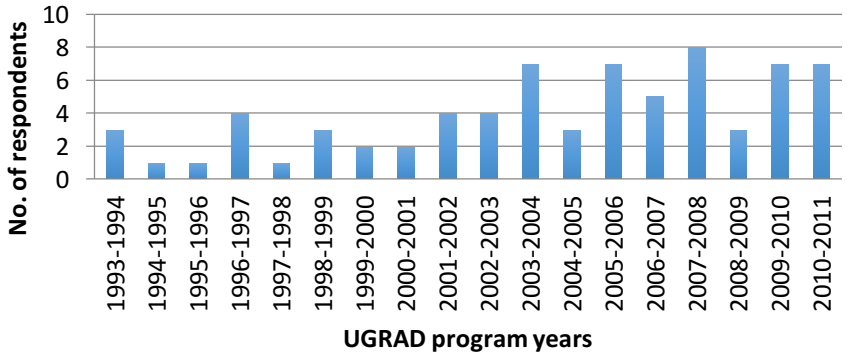


Table 5 presents a profile of the KUAQ respondents. Nearly 60% of respondents (n=43) were female, which is similar to the actual gender breakdown of all Kyrgyz Republic UGRAD participants. Of the 171 Kyrgyz Republic citizens who participated in UGRAD between 1993 and 2011, 64% were female (n=110). Respondents came from each of the seven *oblasts* in the country, and they were almost even distributed between respondents who came from cities with more than 100,000 residents (n=34) and cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants (n=38). Despite this relatively equal distribution, there are only three cities in the Kyrgyz Republic with more than 100,00 inhabitants – Bishkek, Osh, and Jalal Abad. That means nearly one half of all the respondents came from just three cities. Further, only four total respondents reported being from Jalal Abad, so that means no less than 43% of respondents came from just two cities. Of the respondents hailing from cities of fewer than 100,000 people, there is relatively equal distribution among the given population size cohorts.

Table 5 also shows the languages spoken by respondents at home and in school while growing up. As a former Soviet republic, language can be a sensitive topic for some in the Kyrgyz Republic. In general, most ethnic Kyrgyz in the Kyrgyz Republic are able to speak both Kyrgyz and Russian, but it is uncommon for ethnic Russians to speak anything other than Russian. This can be problematic for the Kyrgyz people, as Russian is considered to be a more sophisticated and serious language, while Kyrgyz lies more in the realms of folklore and domesticity (Lowe, 2003). There are nationalistic implications in the use of languages, and it was included as an element of this study to determine if the language used at home and in high school had any implication on the UGRAD experience and objectives, especially in the area of civic engagement. As can be seen in

Table 5
Profile of KUAQ respondents

	N	%
Gender	**72**	**100**
Female	43	60
Male	29	40
Home oblast	**71**	**100**
Batken	3	4
Chui/Bishkek	27	38
Jalal Abad	4	6
Issyk Kul	15	22
Naryn	2	3
Osh	19	26
Talas	1	1
Hometown size	**72**	**100**
>100,000	34	47
50,000-99,999	11	15
25,000-49,999	7	10
10,000-24,999	10	14
1,000-9,999	10	14
<999	0	0
Home language	**72**	**100**
Kyrgyz	33	46
Russian	33	46
Uzbek	5	7
Other	1	1
High school language	**71**	**100**
Kyrgyz	22	31
Russian	43	60
Uzbek	3	4
Other	3	4
Post-UGRAD education attainment	**72**	**100**
High school	1	1
Bachelor's	17	24
Master's	49	68
Doctorate	5	7
Current location	**72**	**100**
Kyrgyz Republic	37	52
United States	12	16
Germany	4	5
Kazakhstan	3	4
United Kingdom	3	4
Australia	2	3
United Arab Emirates	2	3
Other	9	13

Table 5, the distribution of respondents who spoke Russian or Kyrgyz at home was equal. But Table 5 shows that twice as many respondents attended secondary schools in which Russian was the primary language of instruction.

And finally, Table 5 presents some information on the respondents' lives since their UGRAD experience. Over half of the respondents still reside in the Kyrgyz Republic (n=37), and a remarkable 75 percent have gone on to earn degrees beyond a bachelor's degree.

Descriptive Analysis of Data

Respondents of the KUAQ answered questions in regard to the three independent and five dependent variables. All responses were presented in a forced four-point Likert scale. Responses resulted in a composite score for each of the independent and dependent variables. For the three independent variables, the more a UGRAD participant

Table 6
KUAQ Summary Statistics for Thematic Areas (Independent Variables)

	n	Min. value	Max. value	Skewness	Median	Mean	Variance	Coefficient of variance
(T1) Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	71	2.30	4.0	-.30	3.3	3.23	.15	.12
(T2) Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture characteristics	68	2.44	4.0	-1.18	3.67	3.56	.11	.09
(T3) Thematic Area 3: Program characteristics	70	2.67	4.0	-.69	3.56	3.54	.10	.09

Table 7
KUAQ Summary Statistics for Objectives (Dependent Variables)

	n	Min. value	Max. value	Skewness	Median	Mean	Variance	Coefficient of variance
(O1) Objective 1: Promote mutual cultural understanding	71	2.0	4.0	-.66	3.6	3.4	.23	.14
(O2) Objective 2: Change agents	71	1.80	4.0	-1.75	3.8	3.6	.18	.12
(O3) Objective 3: Civil society	72	1.80	4.0	-.29	3.3	3.0	.3	.18
(O4) Objective 4: Enduring ties with U.S. Americans	71	1.60	4.0	-.33	3.2	3.1	.34	.19
(O5) Objective 5: Professional development skills	72	2.0	4.0	-.99	3.8	3.5	.27	.15

experienced factors which are known to promote greater conditions for the development of intercultural competence during an exchange experience, the greater their composite score is. For the dependent variables, greater composite score values indicate more success in achieving the specific UGRAD program objectives. A summary is presented for the independent variables in Table 6, and for the dependent variables in Table 7.

The distribution of the data is negatively skewed for each variable, which means the most of the scores tend to be higher. It is possible that this skewed distribution could be a form of self-reporting bias in which respondents have a tendency to overvalue or overinflate their experiences. Huck (2012) writes that in negatively skewed data sets, the

median is likely to be the most appropriate measure of central tendency (Huck, 2012). Therefore, the median values are also presented in Tables 6 and 7.

Reliability

To test the internal consistency of the variable scales, reliability analyses were completed. Internal consistency is the extent to which items in a scale measure the same concept or

Table 8
Reliability – Independent Variables

	Coefficient Alpha	Coefficient Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items
(T1) Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	.75	.749	10
(T2) Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture characteristics	.72	.749	9
(T3) Thematic Area 3: Program characteristics	.635	.649	9

Table 9
Reliability – Dependent variables

	Coefficient Alpha	Coefficient Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items
(O1) Objective 1: Promote mutual cultural understanding	.731	.751	5
(O2) Objective 2: Change agents	.707	.711	5
(O3) Objective 3: Civil society	.652	.654	5
(O4) Objective 4: Enduring ties with U.S. Americans	.695	.700	5
(O5) Objective 5: Professional development skills	.831	.843	5

construct, and as such, it demonstrates the inter-relatedness of items within the test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The totality of scales for all independent and dependent variables in this study registered relatively high internal consistency, all with coefficient alphas close to or above an acceptable .70 mark (Huck, 2012). Table 8 presents the results of reliability analysis for the three independent variable scales, and Table 9 presents the results for the five dependent variable scales.

Inferential Statistics

A series of Pearson Product Moment Correlations (Pearson r) were computed to describe the magnitude and direction of the simple associations between the respondents' experiences in regard to the three thematic areas and the five UGRAD objectives. The simple associations between thematic areas 2 (i.e., home/host culture characteristics) and 3 (i.e., program characteristics) had correlation coefficients which were statistically significant ($p < .01$) with all five of the outcome variables. The correlation coefficients for thematic area 1 (personal characteristics) were not statistically significantly ($p > .05$) related to any of the five outcomes variables. Results are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10
Correlation Matrix

		O1	O2	O3	O4	O5
T1	Pearson Correlation (r)	.174	-.177	-.117	.083	.002
	Significance (2-tailed)	.150	.143	.333	.497	.990
	N	70	70	71	70	71
T2	Pearson Correlation (r)	.338**	.477**	.370**	.427**	.621**
	Significance (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.002	.000	.000
	N	67	68	68	68	68
T3	Pearson Correlation (r)	.421**	.424**	.301*	.308**	.560**
	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.011	.010	.000
	N	66	70	70	70	70

*. Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
**. Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Regression Analyses

A series of multiple regression analyses were performed to determine the extent to which each predictor variable explained variation in each of the five outcome variables. The multiple correlation coefficient between the three predictor variables and the promotion of mutual cultural understanding (objective 1) was statistically significant ($r = .45$, $p < .01$). Thus, this model accounts for approximately 20% of the variation. Results are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11
Predictors of Mutual Cultural Understanding (Objective 1)

Explanatory Variable	*b*	Beta	*t*	*r*
Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	.20	.18	1.5	.25
Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture	.22	.17	1.2	.33
Thematic Area 3: Program Characteristics	.34	.26	1.8	.40
Constant	.77	---	---	---

Multiple regression statistic: $R^2 = .20$**

NOTE: *b* = unstandardized partial regression coefficient; beta = beta weight, i.e., standardized partial regression coefficient; *t* = t-value of unstandardized regression coefficient; *r* = zero-order correlation between explanatory variable and dependent variable
* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level

The multiple correlation coefficient between the three predictor variables and acting as a change agent was statistically significant ($R = .55$, $p < .001$). Thus, this model accounts for approximately 30% of the variation. Results are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12

Predictors of Change Agents (Objective 2)

Explanatory Variable	*b*	Beta	*t*	*r*
Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	-.23	-.23	-2.0*	-.13
Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture	.38	.31	2.4*	.47
Thematic Area 3: Program Characteristics	.36	.29	2.2*	.42
Constant	1.76	---	---	---

Multiple regression statistic: $R^2 = .30$**

NOTE: *b* = unstandardized partial regression coefficient; beta = beta weight, i.e., standardized partial regression coefficient; *t* = t-value of unstandardized regression coefficient; *r* = zero-order correlation between explanatory variable and dependent variable

* Significant at .05 level

** Significant at .01 level

The multiple correlation coefficient between the three predictor variables and the adherence to elements of civil society (objective 3) was statistically significant ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). Thus, the model accounts for 17% of the variation. Results are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13

Predictors of Civil Society (Objective 3)

Explanatory Variable	*b*	Beta	*t*	*r*
Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	-.24	-.17	-1.4	-.11
Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture	.47	.28	2.0*	.36
Thematic Area 3: Program Characteristics	.27	.16	1.0	.28
Constant	1.2	---	---	---

Multiple regression statistic: $R^2 = .17$**

NOTE: *b* = unstandardized partial regression coefficient; beta = beta weight, i.e., standardized partial regression coefficient; *t* = t-value of unstandardized regression coefficient; *r* = zero-order correlation between explanatory variable and dependent variable

* Significant at .05 level

** Significant at .01 level

The multiple correlation coefficient between the three predictor variables and the creation of enduring ties with U.S. Americans (objective 4) was statistically significant ($r = .45, p < .01$). Thus, this model accounts for 20% of the variation. Results are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14

Predictors of Enduring Ties with U.S. Americans (Objective 4)

Explanatory Variable	*b*	Beta	*t*	*r*
Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	.10	.07	.61	.11
Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture	.71	.43	3.0**	.44
Thematic Area 3: Program characteristics	.02	.01	.07	.28
Constant	.14	---	---	---

Multiple regression statistic: $R^2 = .20$**

NOTE: *b* = unstandardized partial regression coefficient; beta = beta weight, i.e., standardized partial regression coefficient; *t* = t-value of unstandardized regression coefficient; *r* = zero-order correlation between explanatory variable and dependent variable

* Significant at .05 level

** Significant at .01 level

Table 15

Predictors of Professional Development Skills (Objective 5)

Explanatory Variable	*b*	Beta	*t*	*r*
Thematic Area 1: Personal characteristics	-.14	-.10	-1.0	.01
Thematic Area 2: Home/host culture	.70	.45	3.8**	.61
Thematic Area 3: Program characteristics	.50	.31	2.6*	.55
Constant	-.27	---	---	---

Multiple regression statistic: $R^2 = .45$**

NOTE: *b* = unstandardized partial regression coefficient; beta = beta weight, i.e., standardized partial regression coefficient; *t* = t-value of unstandardized regression coefficient; *r* = zero-order correlation between explanatory variable and dependent variable

* Significant at .05 level

** Significant at .01 level

Finally, the multiple correlation coefficient between the three predictor variables and the development of professional skills (objective 5) was also statistically significant ($r = .67$, $p < .001$). Thus, this model accounts for 45% of the variation. Results are summarized in Table 15.

Summary of Quantitative Data Analysis

In a sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014), the quantitative data analysis occurs first, and the findings guide the qualitative data gathering, as the researcher seeks to find rich and descriptive data to build on what was discovered in the quantitative analysis. In this study, according to the quantitative data analyses performed above, it appears that thematic area 1, which is a scale of the personal characteristics a UGRAD participant brings with them to their exchange experience, had little impact on their attainment of program objectives. While the thematic area 1 scale did show high internal consistency ($\alpha = .75$), it showed little or no correlation with any of the five outcome variables, with Pearson r values between -.17 to .17.

Thematic areas 2 and 3, however, appear to have more predictive capabilities in regard to the outcome variables. Both scales showed lower internal consistency ($\alpha = .72$ and .64, respectively) than thematic area 1, but that might be because both had fewer items in their scale than thematic area 1 (Field, 2013). And both thematic areas 2 and 3 showed significant positive correlation ($p < .01$) with all five outcome variables. Especially high were correlations seen between thematic areas 2 and 3 and objectives 2 (change agents) and 5 (professional development). Further, the regression analyses showed that objectives 2 and 5 had the best ability to explain the amount of variation in the outcome variables ($R^2 = .30$ and .45, respectively, $p < .01$).

Given the results of the quantitative analysis, the areas to be explored more deeply in the qualitative data gathering and analysis are the individuals' experiences in regard to thematic areas 2 and 3, and objectives 2 and 5. A maximum variation sampling process was used to select interview participants, as those with lower and upper extreme scores in those four areas will be interviewed in the expectation that their experiences will provide insight into the quantitative findings.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The final question on the KAUQ asked respondents if they would consent to being interviewed for the research project. 54 out of the 72 respondents stated they were willing to be interviewed. 11 of the 54 were eventually selected for conversational,

Table 16
Maximum Variation Sampling

Interviewee pseudonym (F=female, M=male)	Home oblast	UGRAD participation Year	Exchange site Institution type	UGRAD location (state)	Average score of Thematic Areas 2 & 3[1]	Average score of Outcome Variables 2 & 5[2]
Altynai (F)	Chui	1996-1997	2-year	South Carolina	3.72~	4.0 (O+)
Bermet (F)	Osh	1998-1999	4-year	California	3.89+	3.9 (O+)
Cholpon (F)	Chui	1998-1999	2-year	Minnesota	2.89-	2.6 (O-)
Damira (F)	Chui	1998-1999	2-year	Kansas	3.22-	2.8 (O-)
Gulzat (F)	Naryn	2000-2001	4-year	North Carolina	3.67~	4.0 (O+)
Jyldyz (F)	Issyk Kul	2002-2003	4-year	Indiana	3.78~	3.84 (O+)
Aibek (M)	Osh	2001-2002	4-year	Mississippi	2.83-	3.0 (O-)
Batyr (M)	Osh	2005-2006	2-year	Wisconsin	2.67-	1.9 (O-)
Chingiz (M)	Chui	2008-2009	4-year	Illinois	3.89+	3.9 (O+)
Danyar (M)	Chui	2009-2010	4-year	Washington	3.34~	3.1 (O-)
Eldar (M)	Batken	2009-2010	4-year	California	3.94+	3.9 (O+)

[1] *+ represents value > 1σ; ~ represents value within +/- 1σ; - represents value < -1σ;*
[2] *O+ represents value >μ; O- represents value < μ*

in-depth interviews, conducted via Skype. The interviewees were chosen based on maximum variation sampling, which is a strategy to select participants based on their KAUQ results relating to UGRAD experiences and program outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002). Maximum variation is a sampling method in which the participants selected for the research exhibited the full range possible experiences and outcomes (Patton, 2002). Table 16 lists the variables that were used to select participants for the interview phase of the project. Table 16 illustrates two things. First, it shows the variety of backgrounds and experiences of the UGRAD alumni who completed the survey. The ratio of male to female participants was representative of the overall population of years in which the participants were in the UGRAD program, and the oblasts the interview participants come from all closely match the distribution of the total population of KAUQ respondents (see Table 4.2). Second, it shows the interviewees have a wide variety of results in regard to thematic areas 2 and 3, and objectives 2 and 5. These four variables were identified as the most statistically significant in the quantitative analysis done previously.

In addition to the demographic variables considered above, interview participants were selected by examining the variation in results from the KAUQ for the two most statistically significant independent (thematic areas 2 and 3) and dependent (objectives 2 and 5) variables. The KAUQ provided a composite score for respondents for each of the three independent and five dependent variables. The average of the composite scores for thematic areas 2 and 3, and objectives 2 and 5 were used to select interview participants. Interviewees were selected because their average composite scores represented the entire range of KUAQ respondents' results. In other words, interviewees were selected to

Table 17
Mean Average Scores of KAUQ Respondents Willing to be Interviewed

	Average score of Thematic Areas 2 and 3	Average score of Outcome Variables 2 and 5
N	49	53
Mean	3.56	3.59
Std. Deviation	.29	.46
Low-end of range	2.67	1.9
High end of range	4.0	4.0

ensure variation of program experiences and objective attainment. Table 17 shows what the average scores and range of responses for the entire population of KAUQ respondents, while Table 16 provides average values for the individual selected for interviews.

Interviews

The interviews were designed to be conversational, with a protocol being used to give the interviews some semblance of structure, as well as a guide to ensure that interview topics were discussed consistently with each participant. The first part of the protocol contained questions designed to elicit information about thematic areas 2 and 3 by having the interviewee reflect on their UGRAD experience. The second part of the interview contained more pointed questions about the impact their UGRAD experience has had in relation to professional development (objective 5) and becoming a change agent (objective 2). The final question was about the perceived impact the intercultural competence that resulted from UGRAD participation has had on their lives. To reiterate, the quantitative data analysis revealed that respondents' scores in thematic areas 2 and 3 were most positively correlated with objectives 2 and 5.

The interviews were all conducted utilizing Skype software application program.

Interviewees were asked for their permission to have the conversations recorded, and all assented. The average length of interviews 50 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded and saved as .mp4 files using a software program named Audacity. The interview files were then uploaded into a qualitative data software analysis program named MaxQDA. All interviews were transcribed and coded using MaxQDA. After coding the transcribed interviews, several important themes emerged from the data. To maintain confidentiality of the interview participants, each is presented here with a Kyrgyz pseudonym. The pseudonyms will identify the gender of the research participant, but nothing else; Kyrgyz pseudonyms were used for all interviewees regardless if they person is of Kyrgyz, Russian, Uzbek or other origin.

Themes

To reiterate, the primary research question in this study is what are the factors related to the attainment of UGRAD program objectives. Through the use of maximum variation sampling to select interview participants, it was possible to explore this question from the perspectives of those who, according to KUAQ results, have attained the UGRAD program objectives (n=6), and those who have not (n=5). Those with an average score for Outcome Variables 2 and 5 on the KUAQ above the sample population's mean ($\mu = 3.59$) are said to have attained the UGRAD program objectives. They, as a group, will be labeled hereafter as O+. Those with an average score below the mean are said to have not met the program objectives. They, as a group, will be labeled as O-.

It is important to note here that the O+ and O- group labels are nothing more than products of the KUAQ, an instrument which utilized specific UGRAD program outcomes

Table 18
Final Coding Framework

Final coding framework	Initial coding framework
1) Institution type	• Training/orientation • Language skills • Unsatisfying experiences • Living arrangements
2) Contextualized UGRAD experiences	• Program administration • Relationships • Coursework • Service/internship experience
3) Employment/academic opportunities back in KR	• Kyrgyz context • Kyrgyz Republic university • Professional development • Finances

to generate a quantitative value used for grouping and analysis. These labels are in no way meant to judge the lives of the UGRAD alumni or the experiences they had, nor are they meant to imply that some participants are more successful than others. Every UGRAD alum I interviewed expressed extreme appreciation for the exchange opportunity. All said the UGRAD experience empowered them in ways that are impossible to quantify. And all stated that their experiences have had an overwhelmingly positive influence on their lives.

By analyzing the qualitative data from the perspectives of the O+ and O- groups, three themes became apparent in explaining the factors related to the attainment of UGRAD program objectives. Analyzing the data in a comparative manner like this was useful, as the themes emerged and validity was achieved by recognizing what was consistently presented in the narratives of one group, and were consistently omitted or directly contradicted by the other. The themes that emerged, in no particular order, are:

1) Institution type (i.e., two-year community college versus four-year college or university
2) Contextualized UGRAD experiences
3) Employment and/or academic opportunities once back in the Kyrgyz Republic

Viewing the qualitative data through these three themes appears to be most effective way of understanding the differences between those in the O+ group, and those in O-. The three themes are discussed in more detail below.

1) Institution Type – Two-Year Community College Versus Four-Year College or University

UGRAD participants were placed in either a two-year community college or four-year institution in the U.S., depending on their academic progress in the Kyrgyz Republic when they were selected. Participants who were selected during their first year of higher education in the Kyrgyz Republic were placed in two-year community colleges in the U.S. Those who were accepted during their second or third year of higher education were placed in four-year institutions in the U.S. The impact this placement practice had on attainment of program objectives was a significant finding in the qualitative data. Five of the six interview subjects in the O+ group attended four-year institution in the U.S., while four of the five in the O- group attended two-year community colleges. This finding indicates that the characteristics and features of two-year community colleges compared to four-year institutions seemed to play a role in whether or not a participant met the program objectives. The ways in which are examined below.

Expectations

An analysis of the qualitative data of O- group revealed that all in this group experienced some form of initial dissatisfaction with their placement. All but one member of the O- group were placed in community colleges, but all expressed that their first impressions of the school and location did not meet their expectations. Some illustrative statements follow. Batyr, who attended a community college in rural Wisconsin, said:

> I was excited at first, but once I arrived [in Wisconsin], I was immediately disappointed. I had no choice on where I was placed, and I wanted to live in a big city. The school felt very small, like it was a place where everyone already knew each other. International students there didn't really get a chance to meet U.S. students. There weren't a lot of international students, but the ones there pretty much stuck together.

Danyar also had a very different expectation from what he experienced. Despite attending a school in a suburban area of Washington state, he said he felt like he was living in a village:

> I am from Bishkek, so I am used to most people living in apartments. The town felt like a village to me, because all the houses were detached and separate from other houses…And everything was road-based. There were no sidewalks on the roads to walk on so that was like a village.

Damira attended a community college in rural Kansas. She, too, expressed how the setting and the people there did not meet her expectations. She said:

> I went to small school in a rural setting, which was totally different from my upbringing in the capital city Bishkek. The college had a big agricultural focus, and I knew nothing about agriculture… I felt like they made a mistake in putting me there.

Aibek was the sole interview subject from the O- group who attended a four-year school. But he, too, had different expectations from what he experienced. He said:

> We spent our first two weeks in the U.S. in training with other UGRAD participants in Philadelphia. I really enjoyed the training and loved being in Philadelphia. But leaving Philadelphia and going to my university in Mississippi was a disappointment for me. We spent our first time in a nice, big hotel, then went to Mississippi in the middle of a huge cotton field. It was quite shocking.

Despite being asked the same interview questions, only one person from the O+ group expressed either dissatisfaction with their placement or that they felt their site did not meet their expectations. The one person who did express those sentiments happened to be the only person from the O+ group who was placed in a community college.

Being Challenged

Another aspect that helps explain the role that institution-type plays in the attainment of program objectives is how much the participants were challenged during their time in the U.S. A reoccurring narrative that emerged from interviews with members of the O+ group is how they felt challenged by some aspect of their experience, and their ability to overcome the challenge was empowering. Several interviewees referred to receiving poor grades in the first semester of the UGRAD experience, but then making necessary adjustments to improve on their academic performance in the second

semester. Their academic improvement justifiably seemed to give the participants a great deal of confidence. But the challenges were not just academic.

Chingiz attended a private university in suburban Illinois. The challenge he faced was his perceived lack of English language skills. He said:

> I felt my English language skills were poor at that point, despite a good TOEFL score. I felt that I didn't communicate with people very well. My English was sufficient for school and short talks, but I couldn't express myself well. Before leaving for UGRAD I suspected my language skills might not quite be adequate, but I underestimated the impact of the language barrier…I was able to communicate with people, but because of the barrier I couldn't connect with people and wouldn't be best friends for life with the people I met.

Chingiz also commented that his university had a trimester schedule, so courses were shorter in length than he was used to, which made the readings and assignments more intense. Also, he said the courses included more group work than he was used to. Both of these features, he felt, exacerbated his perceived limited English skills. He said:

> Through the first month, I had a tough time…The school was a private college, and there were many small study groups. Teachers were difficult, and homework was given for every class. I felt the assignments were like high school. Lots of papers were assigned. I was stuck in the library all day every day in the first semester, as I had to work hard to overcome the language barrier.

While he eventually did improve his English skills to the point that he was comfortable with the language and made friends, Chingiz continued to challenge himself by enrolling in academically challenging courses in the following two semesters. Thanks to the

challenges, he calls the UGRAD experience "the biggest school of life I ever had." He said:

> I experienced everything from death to learning a new culture and starting from scratch. I was proud of myself what I could do. I thought I knew a lot, then I came to US and learned I didn't know everything. The first half of the experience broke me down, then the second half put me back together in a better way.

When asked if he would do it again, Chingiz replied "Definitely! I would not be who I am without the UGRAD experience."

Others in the O+ group spoke of being challenged by the faculty members at their institutions. Gulzat was raised in a rural area of the Kyrgyz Republic, and she shared that rural students in universities there are treated differently than students from urban areas. She said rural students have a complex about being silent and not standing out. This was a complex she feels she brought with her to the U.S., and one that she was thankfully challenged to overcome. She said:

> I appreciated that all students in the U.S. were treated as equals. In Kyrgyzstan professors only work with some students, not everyone… I had an internship with the student government. When considering proposals, anyone in the room could be called on to give their opinion, so you had to be prepared if you were asked. It was good for me as I learned it was important to have thoughts on all proposals, and it is valuable for all voices to be heard.

Bermet attended a public school in rural northern California, and she, too, was challenged by a professor. She said:

> I was a journalism major in Kyrgyzstan, but the field there was still using old Soviet methods. I learned the "5 Ws" of journalism through an assignment in this class. The professor told me that every other international student who has taken this class has dropped it, and he asked me if I wanted to drop. I did not want to drop, as I was there to learn everything I could. By the end of the class, not only did I do well in class, many of my articles were published in the student paper.

Experiences like this gave Bermet confidence and a sense of empowerement. She says her "U.S. professors encouraged me. They pushed me. They told me 'you have bright future.' I owe a lot to them. They inspired and encouraged me. They told me that I am special, and I had never been told that."

Another type of challenge faced by a member in the O+ group is from an internship experience. Jyldyz attended an urban institution in Indiana and earned a paid-internship position with a public opinion laboratory. Her position required her to call Indiana residents on the phone to ask questions for various public opinion polls. She said:

> This was a very challenging experience. Most of the employees only lasted there about two weeks. People often were not willing to answer questions on the phone, and they were not always nice. But I had to figure out how to work with everyone. I was able to take feedback about being friendly and efficient. It was very challenging environment but succeeding there built my confidence.

The challenges that were so prevalent in the experiences of the people in the O+ group had a four-year colleges and universities were not expressed by those in O-, especially those at two-year community colleges. Damira said "I felt that all the classes

were very easy and I did not have to study much. I was not challenged in classes and my required service felt like factory work." Cholpon said "I looked upon the experience as more culture and fun than academic." Batyr said that he did not have to be hard-working and that "there were always opportunities to party." Danyar was a software engineering student in the Kyrgyz Republic, but he was sent to an institution without this specific major. Instead of his engineering program, they put him in a graphic design program. "I was not happy about this," he said. "I was frustrated by this, and was not allowed to go to a different campus of the school that had the program I wanted." Further, none of the four from community colleges mentioned anything about being challenged by faculty members.

Relationships

The third way in which the qualitative data indicate that placement at either a two-year or four-year institutions manifested itself in an impactful way was in the types of relationships students experienced at each. Again, it is illustrative to present the findings in this area comparatively so that the differences between the two groups are clear and understood.

The four members of the O- group who attended community colleges did not have the opportunity to live on-campus. Only one community college attending O- group member (Cholpon) reported a positive host-family experience; the other three all had issues that were serious enough that required them to move to other host-families. Batyr had an especially egregious relationship with his host father. He said:

> My host was actually an older, single, Vietnam war veteran male who housed four or five international students for money. This was disappointing to me as I was really hoping to live with an actual family…The host father told me about his homosexual orientation…The father would try to touch me and kiss me. I felt very uncomfortable there and didn't ever want to go home. And the school did not give me any support with the situation. As a result, my grades were terrible.

The situation with his host father culminated in a physical altercation. He said:

> I shared a room with other international students. One morning in the winter the host father woke us all up early to make us go out to shovel. I had enough of him at that point and we had an argument and physical confrontation. After the fight I was able to move to an on-campus room.

Due to the untenable situation with his host, Batyr had failing first semester grades and was told he would be kicked out of the UGRAD program. However, he decided to tell the UGRAD program administrators in Washington, D.C. about his home stay situation, and they moved him to a new site in Washington state. There he attended a different community college, and was placed with another host family. He said:

> There my host family was Iranian immigrants with a child. They were nice, but I felt they were too religious. I felt very restricted in what I could and could not do. Again the host family situation was different from what I wanted and expected. In my mind, I wanted a white American family.

Damira also reporting having problems with her host families. She had four different living arrangements, which included three different host families and one short stint in on-campus housing. She said:

> I had conflict with the first family I lived with. They were too demanding, and they would lock me out of the house. It was the home of recovering alcoholic, and they were overly-worried about me getting in trouble with alcohol. They were also very religious and they actively tried to convert me to Christianity. Even though I am a nonbeliever….The second host family was an employee of the college. That woman was nice, but she had issues of her own, and this was a temporary arrangement until a different living arrangement could be found. I then lived in a dormitory. This was a fun and nice experience. At the time, I was working as a translator for a group of Ukrainian business people. At one of the functions I met a nice, older family who invited me to live with them. And that was a positive host family experience for the last couple of months there.

Danyar had two switch host families twice in his first semester in the U.S., but ultimately had a good experience with his third family. He said:

> I was not happy at my first family. The host family was paid through the program, but the host family made him pay for things like toilet paper. I then moved in with a second host family, which was not a better experience then with first family. The second family did not trust me and would not give me a key to the house. I was often left outside locked out in the rain…They also forced me to clean things in the house that no one else had to do.

In addition to the living arrangements detailed above, the community college students all reported difficulties meeting and interacting with U.S. students. The majority of their interaction with other students their school was other international students. None mentioned anything about meaningful relationships or interactions with faculty

members, and most said that their institution had little or no specific support for international students. It should be noted that Aibek, the one O- member who attended a four-year institution, also reported having difficulty meeting U.S. students. He said:

> Interactions with U.S. students were not easy because there were so many international students around. The campus seemed to be segregated between U.S. students and international students. I lived the second semester in a different dorm around many U.S. students including football players and sportsmen. Still there was not a lot of contact. Communication with U.S. students basically occurred in class or in common areas of the dormitories, but nothing deep.

The only reference Aibek made to faculty members was after the attacks of September 11, 2001. He was in the U.S. at that time, and he did talk about receiving support from university faculty. He said:

> 9/11 occurred when I was there, and we had heated debates in class about why it happened and who is responsible…. Professors expressed concern about my safety, because they knew I was from a Muslim country. So I was happy they were concerned. But my appearances is more Chinese or Korean, so I did not have any problems. People did not mistake me for Saudi or Middle Eastern.

In contrast to the experiences of those in the O- group, the O+ group members who attended four-year institutions all lived on-campus. Most lived with either U.S. students, or a mix of international and U.S. students. According to the information analyzed from the qualitative interviews, the O+ group members seemed able to develop more positive relationships with people from the U.S. and other international students at their four-year institutions, which can be attributed to these institutions have a better

international student support structure.

Bermet was the only one person in O+ who reported having exclusively international roommates, but she said:

> My flat mates were all international, but the dorms had shared common areas with all the other housing, so there was a lot of mingling between international and U.S. students. I interacted with domestic students all the time - shopping, hanging out. U.S. students approached international students first. We socialized all the time.

Another important aspect of Bermet's experience in the U.S. was the opportunity to get involved in formal student leadership groups.

> Each floor in housing had a student leadership group. I got involved with this organization. I met so many people through this experience, and others told me that they learned how to be leaders by watching me. Receiving feedback like this was such a confidence booster.

Jyldyz said that she learned a lot from the discussion style courses she took. Her institution is situated in an urban area of Indiana, and many of the students are non-traditional and commuters. She said she developed a sincere appreciation for the types of people who pursue continuing education opportunities. She said:

> I really enjoyed the group discussions in each course. The school is a community university in that there are a lot of nontraditional students. The concept of lifelong learning is not common in Kyrgyz Republic. In Kyrgyz Republic if you're past 22, you don't think of going to university. I came to recognize that I enjoyed meeting and interacting with people who recognized that they lacked certain skills/knowledge. They were going to school to build their capacity, and I respect that. Persons of different age made discussions in classes interesting and varied, and much different than what 18- or 19 year-olds would say.

Chingiz related how he benefitted from a program for international student administered by his institution's international student services office. He said:

> I lived on campus with one U.S. and one international student. But I was also assigned a friend-family. This was not a living situation, but a U.S. family for me to connect with. The university matched me with the friend-family in the first week I was there. I am still very close with that family. The family was very good to me, and they are great people. Without them, it would have been a lot harder to survive…I'd say that 30% of what I learned about the US people and culture was through my friend-family.

Altynai was the one individual in the O+ group who attended a community college. She did not report the same problem of meeting and interacting with U.S. students that other UGRAD community college attendees had. But the relationships she did develop with the local residents were more problematized than those the UGRAD participants at four-year institutions described. She said:

> I had previously thought the U.S. was one big New York City or Los Angeles. This was a stereotype I think a lot of UGRAD students had when they came. At my school in North Carolina, I felt like the UGRAD students were the best there. The U.S. student were not exposed to the world and were not ambitious. There were people who thought it was okay to be married in pregnant at 18, or flip burgers for the rest of their lives.

Despite perceiving a different set of personal values and attitudes than her classmates in North Carolina, Altynai was able to use critical reflection to understand more about the situation there. She said:

> I realized I can't go around telling everyone around if they don't excel in school that they will end up in the deep woods, flipping burgers for the rest of your life. If it is his or her choice, let him do it. What I learned is that not everyone is as ambitious as I am, and not everyone is willing to work as hard. And that's okay because at the end of the day everyone gets whatever efforts he or she put in…. I came to understand that the main purpose of UGRAD is not to excel academically in U.S. universities, but to gain understanding of US culture.

To summarize, the type of institution UGRAD alumni attended appears to be a factor related to the attainment of UGRAD program objectives. Those who attended four-year institutions were far more likely to meet the program objectives than those who attended two-year community colleges. From an analysis of the qualitative data, an experience at a four-year institution contributes to the meeting of program objectives more than experience at a two-year community college by virtue of the overall campus environment being more aligned with the expectations of the incoming students, by

providing participants with a more challenging student experience, and by providing more structured opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with people from the U.S.

2) Contextualized UGRAD Experiences

The second major theme to emerge from the qualitative data was the contextualization of the UGRAD experiences. Comparing the interview data of the two groups of participants, those in the O+ consistently explained how their experiences in UGRAD were in some way tied to their own personal context. For these subjects, most were seriously engaged in an academic major and wanted to further their knowledge in that field through intentionally-selected course work in the U.S. The others had a clearly-defined goal for UGRAD of improving their English language skills with the understanding that their languages skills would be beneficial to their professional careers. For these people, their UGRAD experiences were chosen intentionally, and they were tied to their own personal context. For the people in the O- group, they did not express as much intentionality in choosing their experiences, and their coursework was often not related to their academic interests. This theme of contextualized experiences will be described in detail below.

Bermet is an example of a participant whose UGRAD coursework had great personal relevance for her, which she has parlayed into a successful academic career. Bermet was a journalism major in the Kyrgyz Republic prior to her UGRAD experience, and was able to enroll in journalism courses when she was in the U.S. As was detailed before, Bermet's training in journalism training prior to UGRAD was in the "old Soviet methods." But the coursework she chose in the U.S. taught her new journalistic methods,

and a critical-thinking approach. She said:

> The biggest professional development skill I learned was the ability to think analytically and work independently. I learned to recognize an argument, understand evidence, process a lot of information and input using my own analytical skills. The foundation to do all this was built in my UGRAD experience.

Bermet used her newly built "foundation" to complete a master's and Ph.D. program in journalism, earn a faculty appointment at a prestigious university in the Kyrgyz Republic, and serve as a higher education administrator who worked to "transform curriculum from the old Soviet model to a more western one."

Chingiz is another example of a student taking coursework in the U.S. to supplement his knowledge in his academic major. He said:

> I knew before UGRAD that I wanted to be in the field of food science. I chose the program in UGRAD which was closest to my college major. I studied organic chemistry and biosciences in Kyrgyz Republic. I had a choice of different fields to study in the U.S., and the option I chose was in chemistry.

Chingiz knew that the courses he took in the U.S. would not count towards his degree in the Kyrgyz Republic, but he was more interested in learning content than earning credits. He said "some of the courses I took in the U.S. were ones I had already taken in Kyrgyz Republic. But it was still a benefit as the ones in the U.S. were taught at a higher level." Chingiz is now a professional in the field of food science in Denmark.

Altynai had applied to Freedom Support Act (FSA) programs (e.g., FLEX and UGRAD) three times before she was accepted. Following her successful third

application, she says "I was very well-prepared for the experience, and I had a good sense of why I wanted to go." She said that her goal was to improve her English to pursue a goal in an international setting. During her time in the U.S., she was intentional about enrolling in courses that were not available to her at her Kyrgyz university. "I took courses I could not get in the Kyrgyz Republic like economics and business-based statistics." She also concentrated on courses that helped her develop her writing and critical thinking skills. Altynai has used the skills developed in UGRAD to have a successful career as a technical writer for multinational companies in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Jyldyz also applied to FSA programs three times before she was successful. She did not have any specific professional goals, but she said "I realized it was not academic content but international experience that would open up professional doors for me. People seem to recognize you are smart and accomplished if you are selected for a program like UGRAD." In an attempt to develop her professional competencies, Jyldyz intentionally sought out a competitive and demanding internship position with a public opinion laboratory. Her time working with the company was very challenging, but she ranks it as the most important experience during her UGRAD time in terms of the developing the professional skills that have made her a successful translator for multinational companies in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The stories of the O- group participants did not contain references to intentional choices regarding UGRAD coursework and experiences. To illustrate, Cholpon said that she knew her courses in the U.S. would not count towards her degree in the Kyrgyz Republic, so she "chose courses just for fun. Thinking back, I didn't really understand

the community college system." Damira said that she applied for the UGRAD program mainly because her best friend applied. She was an international relations major in Kyrgyz Republic, but was forced to take business courses in the U.S. She said the courses, despite having no business background, were very easy. Batyr says he partied too much in the U.S., and paired with the problems he had with his host father, he says he did not learn anything of value from his coursework. And for his service work, he was randomly assigned a job servicing bicycles for the campus bike-share program. And finally, Danyar went into his UGRAD experience with a strong interest in software engineering, but the school he was placed at did not offer courses in that discipline. He was frustrated by the fact that the only thing he could take was graphic design courses. For his service project, he was assigned to work for an ecology group.

To summarize the findings in this area, a commonality of the stories of all the members in the O+ group was that they chose their UGRAD coursework with an eye towards improving their academic knowledge or professional competencies. As a result, their experiences were meaningful, and the lessons they learned led to skills and competencies they still use today. In contrast, the UGRAD recollections from the O- group do not contain the same references to intentionality in choosing coursework or experiences. It appears that contextualized experiences during the UGRAD experience is a factor that contributes to alumni meeting program objectives.

3) Tying UGRAD Experience to Post-UGRAD Employment/Academic Opportunities

The third major theme to emerge from the qualitative data that examines the relationship between certain factors of the UGRAD experience and their attainment of

program objectives on the part of alumni is the importance of tying their UGRAD experience into employment or academic opportunities when they returned home to finish their degrees in the Kyrgyz Republic. According to Jyldyz, it is not common for college students in the Kyrgyz Republic to have employment opportunities while they are in school. But following the UGRAD experience, employment doors did open for alumni that were not open for other students. For those who were able to take advantage of such opportunities, a head start in the professional world seems to have a positive effect on UGRAD objective attainment. This principle appears to apply to success in academic endeavors also. The members of O+ who did not get jobs immediately after returning to Kyrgyz Republic took advantage of academic opportunities that led to graduate work abroad and positive objective attainment. This theme is explored in more detail below.

From the O+ group, Jyldyz used the confidence she gained from her experience at the Indiana public opinion laboratory to land a part-time job as soon as she returned. She said:

> In the Kyrgyz Republic, when students graduate from university, many lack the confidence to successfully pursue jobs because of their lack of professional experiences. Graduates are often not confident enough to push for jobs. But I gained a lot of confidence from my internship, and I was able to use it to successfully pursue jobs.

She credits her UGRAD experience for helping her land high-paying jobs doing translation and interpretation, which gave her enough security to pursue different interests, freedom to choose projects that fit her personal interests, and flexibility to raise a family in the way she wants while still being a professional.

Gulzat credits a course she took in the U.S. with her employment opportunity after returning home. Prior to going to the U.S., Gulzat had very little experience with computers. But she was able to gain proficiency in computer skills and book lay design thanks to a professor in the U.S. She said:

> I learned so many technical and computer skills in my U.S. classes. I had a professor who would say 'don't be afraid to click on anything.' This took all the fear I had out of working with computers. The professor reminded us that the worst thing that can happen is the computer may blowup. This was a good reminder for us, and encouraged us to experiment and learn.

Gulzat landed a job when she returned and said "I had the best computer skills of anyone in the office." She was able to parlay these skills into a career in creating civics education textbooks in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Chingiz had a similar story, in that he took certain things that he learned in the U.S. and was able to apply them to a part-time job, a graduate degree, then into a career in food science - the field that was his primary goal. He says that he was inspired by the presence of student groups in the U.S., and began a social science research group at his university in Kyrgyz Republic. The group focused on research projects to help address the issue of iron deficiency in the country. The research skills he developed in UGRAD and with the student group led to a part-time job while still an undergraduate, which then led to a scholarship for a graduate program in Europe, and a current position there with Nestle.

Similarly, Bermet used her newfound journalism skills to impress the faculty at her university in the Kyrgyz Republic. At that time, the university was creating a

program to improve local instructors instead of relying on foreign faculty. In the program, the university would select a small number of undergraduates and send them to the U.S. for master's degrees. In exchange for the opportunity, the selected participants would agree to teach at the university for four years. Bermet was selected to participate, did her master's degree in the U.S., and returned to her alma mater in Kyrgyz Republic for "the most productive and happiest years of my life." At that point she became dedicated to creating knowledge about central Asia, as opposed to importing it.

On the O- side, three of the five people in that group did not tie their exchange experience into professional or academic opportunities upon returning to the Kyrgyz Republic. Batyr decided to transfer to a new university when he returned to the Kyrgyz Republic, but he could not settle on a major. He ended up transferring back to his pre-UGRAD university, taking a break from school to work in Russia to earn money, then eventually dropped out of college all together. Cholpon never returned to the Kyrgyz Republic after her UGRAD experience, as she ended up marrying another international student who attended the same school as her. Danyar outed himself as a gay male when returned to the Kyrgyz Republic after UGRAD. Despite attending the most liberal and progressive university in the country, he says he was not accepted in the software engineering program there and had to transfer to a different program. Dayar became involved with advocacy groups for LGBT rights in the Kyrgyz Republic, and became a well-known figure thanks to the blogs and videos he would post online. Unfortunately, his notoriety led his family to be concerned for his safety, and he ultimately left the country. He is now in Europe and finally pursing the software engineering degree he had not been able to attain since his UGRAD days.

Aibek and Damira are in the O- group, but by measures other than the KUAQ they would likely be considered "successful" exchange participants. (The KUAQ values are based on the participants' own perceptions, so their inclusion in the O- group may be a case of response bias.) Aibek is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the United Kingdom, and prior to that, had a successful career as an educator in the Kyrgyz Republic. His path was similar to those in the O+ group, in that he found a job immediately after returning, and followed opportunities to do graduate programs abroad. The same situation applies to Damira. She landed a job in a bank when she returned, helped implement their online banking services, went back to the U.S. for an MBA program, created a successful business, and leads a professional development mentoring program for high school students in the Kyrgyz Republic.

To summarize, a common element in the experience of those who were deemed to have met the objectives of the UGRAD program was their ability to tie their experience into professional or academic opportunities upon returning. In this sense, the UGRAD experience seemed to present the alumni with opportunities that normal university students would not have. At the same time, the alumni also seemed to gain the confidence to pursue these opportunities.

Summary of Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data was able to provide some deeper understanding of the results of the quantitative data analysis. From the interviews of UGRAD alumni, three major themes emerged that are related to the factors which promote the attainment of UGRAD program objectives. The major themes are: 1) the type of institution the UGRAD participant attended is related to the attainment of

objectives; 2) the ability to contextualize the coursework and experiences a participant had during their experience also seemed to contribute to the attainment of program objectives; and 3) the ability to tie their UGRAD experience into professional or academic opportunities when they were back in the Kyrgyz Republic was also found to be related to the attainment of program objectives. The various implications of these findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusion - Implications for Theory, Policy and Practice

To summarize, this research project is a mixed methods study to determine which factors influence the achievement of UGRAD program objectives, as perceived by the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic who participated in the program between 1993 and 2011.

To explore these the research question, the researcher contacted as many of the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic as possible and asked them to complete the Kyrgyz UGRAD alumni questionnaire (KUAQ). Of the 171 people who participated in the UGRAD program from the Kyrgyz Republic between 1993 and 2011, 72 alumni completed the KUAQ (estimated 42% response rate). The quantitative data gathered from the KAUQ was analyzed, and the results informed the next phase of the research project, which was in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with 11 of the KUAQ respondents. The interview participants were chosen using *maximum variation sampling* (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002) which allowed the researcher to explore the topics with UGRAD alumni who presented a wide variety of personal backgrounds, UGRAD experiences, and post-participation outcomes, as determined by the KAUQ. After analyzing the qualitative data, some common themes emerged which provide valuable insight into answering the research question.

Conclusions

Primary Research Question: which factors influence the achievement of UGRAD program objectives, as perceived by the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic?

Before concluding which factors influence the achievement of program objectives, it is helpful to remember a quote from Engle and Engle presented in Chapter

2. They wrote the "desired and real outcomes [of international education exchange experiences] are as individual as the students themselves, each with her or his unique life tale, motivation, and imagined future" (2003, p. 5). This statement resonates with the findings of the study. Each UGRAD participant brought a different set of personal characteristics, expectations and experiences with them into the UGRAD program. No one participant's interaction with the culture of the U.S. was identical to another's. And each encountered their own mix of challenges and opportunities at their institution and in their internship. Given this, as one might expect, the factors found to influence the outcome of one participant largely differed for each individual. As such, it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study onto other groups of governmentally–funded international exchange participants. But there were ample consistencies identified in this study's research participants' experiences to provide us with insight into the research question. Certain factors within each of the three thematic areas were found to be influential on the achievement of UGRAD program objectives. This section will examine the specific influential factors within each thematic area.

Thematic Area 1: Personal Characteristics (T1)

The factors within T1 were found to be the least influential category of the Thematic Triad. From the quantitative data analysis, T1 had little impact on the attainment of program objectives. However, an important finding from an analysis of the qualitative data that relates to personal characteristics is that a participant's prior higher education experience was determined to have an influence on the achievement of UGRAD program objectives. Prospective UGRAD participants are allowed to apply for the program during either their first, second, or third year of higher education in the

Kyrgyz Republic. Those who were accepted and participated in the program after just one year of higher education were less likely to be in the group of research participants deemed to have successfully achieved the program objectives. At the same time, UGRAD participants who spent either two or three years in higher education prior to participating in the program were more likely to be in the group of research participants deemed to have successfully achieved the objectives. Several reasons explain this finding, some of which are interrelated to factors in T2 and T3. But the findings can be explained from the T1 perspective in that is important that participants had meaningful learning experiences in the U.S. which directly tied into their personal ideas on their academic or professional goals. Just one year of prior higher education does not appear to be enough for the UGRAD participants to be sufficiently invested in their academic and/or career goals. They were largely unable to take the learning and experiences they had in the U.S. to use them in a way that translates to the achievement of program objectives. Indeed, many of them claimed their motivation for applying for the UGRAD program was simply for fun. On the other hand, many of those deemed to have achieved the objectives went into the experience with concrete professional goals, or were committed to their academic major and took courses in the U.S. which they knew were unavailable in their home university, thus intentionally furthering their learning in the field.

Thematic Area 2: Home/Host Country Cultural Characteristics

T2 was found to be influential on the attainment of UGRAD program objectives. An analysis of the qualitative data found the most influential factors in T2 which promoted the achievement of program objectives to be the feeling of a sense of belonging

to a community in the U.S. that included host-country natives. Those deemed to have been successful in achieving UGRAD program objectives spoke consistently of developing strong ties or connections to people through their academic department, internship or volunteer experience, or student organizations and activities on campus. On the other hand, those deemed to be unsuccessful in achieving program objectives shared very few examples meaningful relationships, involvement on or off campus. Further, the important relationships they did form seemed to be with other international students or host-families. They did not appear to develop ties with their host-country peers or people associated with their internships or academics. This factor appears to be closely related to the findings in T1, as prior higher education experience determined if they attended a community college or four-year college or university. It appears that participants took advantage of whatever opportunities their environment provided them, and participants at four-year institutions appear to have been afforded more opportunities than their counterparts at community colleges to interact with host-country peers, whether through residence halls or student activities, and engage in challenging and meaningful activities. Four-year institutions appear to be structured in a way that their environment is more conducive to fostering deeper relationships between students and faculty/staff than at the community colleges attended by UGRAD participants.

Thematic Area 3: Program Characteristics

Of the three thematic areas, the factors within T3 were found to have the most influence on the attainment of UGRAD program objectives. The program characteristics, or more specifically, the characteristics of the program that were in place at the institution the participants attended, were determined to have more of an influence on the

achievement of UGRAD program objectives than the other two thematic areas. As mentioned in the discussion of T1 factors, the amount of prior higher education experience was found to be influential in the achievement of UGRAD program objectives. That finding is relevant in T3, too, because UGRAD participants with just one year of prior higher education in the Kyrgyz Republic were placed in community colleges, while everyone with two or three years of prior experience attended four-year colleges or universities. From the qualitative data, it emerged that community colleges simply did not present the necessary level of support and learning experiences that influence the achievement of program objectives. This was found to be the case for three main reasons. First, community colleges did not typically offer on-campus housing options for UGRAD participants. This meant that most were placed in off-campus host-family situations. Host-family setting can have positive benefits, but in the case of the many of the UGRAD participants, it meant they were denied opportunities to meet and have meaningful interactions with host-country students outside the classroom. Also, many of the host-families appear to have welcomed in UGRAD participants more as boarders than cultural mentors. Because of this, many did not have meaningful personal interactions with their hosts, and some of those who did develop those relationships did so only after having bounced between multiple host-families. Second, the community colleges attended by UGRAD participants simply did not appear to offer the same level of student services that their counterparts found at four-year institutions. This meant that the community colleges had few professional staff members directly responsible for the well-being of UGRAD students beyond the basic administration of program requirements. And third, community colleges did not appear to present UGRAD

participants with a high level of academic rigor. Many of the participants in community colleges reported not being challenged academically, and that the coursework was not relavent to their interests. The lack of attention to academics led some into a partying lifestyle, some into an isolated existence. In contrast, those at four-year colleges and universities lived in dormitories met and interacted with students from all over the U.S. and world, got involved in student leadership activities, and became involved in many different activities. They also were better supported in terms of student services, took coursework that challenged them to be more critical thinkers, and they were mentored by involved faculty members. These factors all appeared to have had an impact on the achievement of UGRAD program objectives.

The Role of Intercultural Competence

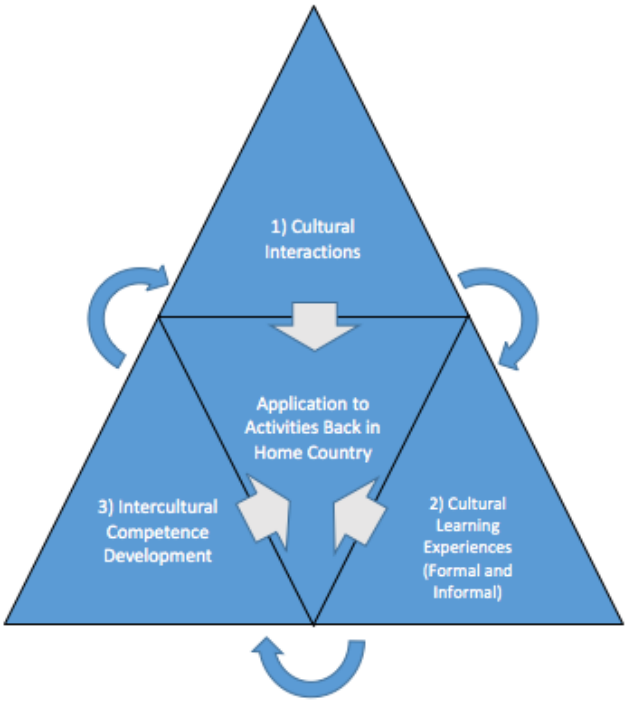
During the qualitative interviews, participants were asked to describe their intercultural learning activities, as well as the role that development of their own intercultural competence has played in their lives since UGRAD participation. All spoke positively of the benefits of their intercultural learning experiences, as well as the role that intercultural competencies have had on their personal and professional lives. In their own way, each interviewee referenced an empowering effect that the increased intercultural competencies, improved English language abilities, and enhanced critical thinking skills developed from participation in the program has had on their lives, regardless if the interviewee was deemed to have successfully achieved the UGRAD objectives or not. Therefore, there was no variance found in this variable, so this factor could not be attributed directly to the achievement of UGRAD objectives.

This study used the factors in Stephenson's Thematic Triad (2002) as a

conceptual model to operationalize the conditions known to promote the development of intercultural competence as part of an international education exchange program. Based on the findings from this research, a better way to conceptualize the way in which the totality of intercultural experiences during an exchange program can contribute to the achievement of program objectives emerged. This new conceptualization takes the form of an intercultural experience tetrahedron (Figure 8). Borrowing from the fields of geometry and physics, a tetrahedron consists of four equilateral triangles. In this case, each of the triangles is a different element in an international education exchange experience, and they are all inter-related in the sense that are connected and contribute to the experience in each of the triangles. The three triangles, or elements, that make up the outside of the tetrahedron are: 1) the cultural interaction an exchange participant

Figure 8

Intercultural Experience Tetrahedron



experiences during their program abroad; 2) the formal and informal cultural learning experiences; and 3) the subsequent development of intercultural competencies. These three exterior triangles then influence the interior fourth triangle, which is the way in which the exchange participant then applies their newly gained knowledge and skills back to their home context. The intercultural experience tetrahedron may be a useful model for future studies to understand more clearly the relationship between the elements of an international education exchange experience and the ability of participants to transfer their new knowledge and skills back to their home environment because the tetrahedron eliminates from consideration factors from Stephenson's Thematic Triad which were not found to be significant.

Recommendations for Further Research

The investment in international education and training exchange programs is deeply ingrained in practice of U.S. foreign policy, as reflected in the $1.7 billion spent by 59 different federal governmental agencies in 2013 (IAWG, 2014). So it is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. But several important questions related to this study and the use of international exchange warrant further research. They are:

- What effect do different demographic traits have on the ability for international education and training program participants more apt to meet program objectives than others? This study gathered information from respondents on various demographic categories like gender, language, home town size, etc., but these elements were not factor in to the final analysis. Further research that considers these factors is warranted.

- What is the actual development of intercultural competency on the UGRAD program and to what degree is that development attributable to program objectives?
- What impact do international education and training exchange participants have on the development of democratic institutions in their home countries?
- What impact do international education and training exchange participants have on the development of free market economies in their home countries?
- How does the experience of undergraduate international education exchange participants differ when they are placed in a community college compared to a four-year institution?
- What impact does the J-visa two-year home residency requirement have on exchange participants and program outcomes?

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study can be used to inform the leadership practices of international education administrators so that their actions can help participants achieve the program objectives. These findings can be addressed from the leadership perspectives of both UGRAD program administrators and administrators at institutions of higher education in the U.S.

For UGRAD program administrators, it may be beneficial for them to structure the program to limit participation to those after their second or third year of higher education in their home country. This move would increase the likelihood that the participants will be able to use the experience to further their learning in an academic program they are committed to in order to contextualize their UGRAD experience. As

was described in Chapter 4, contextualizing their experience means participants are more personally invested and interested in a specific academic major or career path, and their activities in the U.S. would be conducted with their own advancement in those interests in mind. Along the same line, it is recommended that administrators place an emphasis on academic or career path maturity as part of the application and selection process.

As for placement at the different types of higher education institutions, community college placements can be effective in serving UGRAD participants who achieve program objectives. Community colleges should continue to have the same right as four-year institutions to host these exceptional students, but the leadership of the UGRAD program (currently an organization named World Learning) should carefully vet all institutions (community college and four-year institutions alike) who apply to host a UGRAD student(s) to ensure they are capable of providing the necessary housing, support, and services participants need to be challenged and meaningfully engaged. Program administrators should also seek to engage with all UGRAD hosting institution by providing information and training for them that covers important information like program objectives, expectations, and successful practices in working with governmentally sponsored exchange students.

Likewise, it is important for leadership at U.S. institutions to ensure that they can provide all the necessary support and services before applying to host UGRAD students. Examples of necessary support and services are:

- Access to academic advisors who can take the time to talk with participants to understand their individual goals in order to register them for courses that are both meaningful and challenging;

- Availability of a broad range of internship and/or volunteer opportunities to match the talents and interest of the participant;
- Access to housing in which they can reside with their peers – whether host-country or international, but preferably host-country;
- Programs which intentionally aim to help participants forge meaningful relationships with professionals who can mentor them in either an academic or professional context. An element of this mentorship should be a critical examination of future goals and strategies for utilizing the knowledge gained in the U.S. after returning home

Implications for Theory

The findings of this study have implications for theories previously examined in the literature review, as well as theories not previously examined. The primary theoretical lens through which this study was viewed was Stephenson's Thematic Triad (2002). Stephenson's triad are series of factors which, when present in a study abroad experience, are known to create an environment in which the development of intercultural competence is possible. Stephenson groups the factors into three different themes which comprise the triad. The assumption that an international exchange participant's ability to achieve program objectives is related to their intercultural competence is a premise underpinning this study. But since it is impossible at this point in time to attribute a UGRAD participant's intercultural competence directly to their UGRAD experience, Stephenson's factors - along with some others gleaned from experiential learning theory - were used as a proxy for a participant's intercultural competence. While Stephenson's Thematic Triad proved to be a fruitful framework for

this study, the findings were somewhat contradictory in that the one thematic area Stephenson purports to be the most important for the development of intercultural competence was found to be the least important for achieving UGRAD objectives. Stephenson wrote T1 is "by far" the most important of the three thematic areas in shaping whether or not a study abroad participant develops intercultural competence (2002, pg. 93). The findings here that the factors T2 and T3 were more closely related to positive outcomes related to program objectives might suggest that the development of intercultural competence is not related to achievement of UGRAD program objectives.

To understand why this might be the case, it is useful to refer back to the literature about the development of intercultural competence. It is thought that true intercultural competence incorporates the totality of a person's cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains (J. Bennett, 2008; J. Bennett, 2015; M. Bennett, 1993; Byram, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Goodykunst, 1991; Hamilton et al, 1998; Martin, 1987; Pusch, 2009; Pusch & Merrill, 2008; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ward et al, 2001). Looking at the Thematic Triad through the intercultural competency lens, the factors in T1 are very closely related to competencies in the affective domain, while the factors in T2 and T3 are more closely related to elements in the cognitive and behavioral domains. According to Bennett (2008), affective domain characteristics are a sojourner's level of curiosity, their tolerance for ambiguity, resourcefulness, and open-mindedness. Each of these characteristics is included in T1. On the other hand, behavioral domain characteristics (e.g., ability to manage social interactions and anxiety), and cognitive domain characteristics (e.g., culture-specific information, understanding of cultural adaptation process, and cultural self-awareness) are more closely related to factors in T2

and T3. Neither the quantitative nor qualitative data analyzed in this study indicated that T1 factors (i.e., those relating to participants' affective domain) influenced UGRAD program objective achievement. Whereas factors from T2 and T3 (i.e., those more closely related to behavioral and cognitive domains) did influence the achievement of program objectives.

The notion that behavioral and cognitive elements of intercultural competency development are more influential on the achievement of UGRAD program objectives than affective domains may speak to the differing forms of civil society that UGRAD participants were exposed to in the United States and what they encountered back at home in the Kyrgyz Republic. Referring back to the literature review, the neoliberal form of civil society found in the United States is characterized as an intermediary realm between the home and state, made up of voluntary associations of non-governmental actors, working to extend or protect the interests and values of the group (Manor, Robinson & White 1999). Also, relationships in neoliberal civil society are based on weak ties spanning across relatively homogeneous segments of society (Gibson, 2001). In contrast, closed social networks and strong personal ties are trademarks of post-Soviet legacy society, and as a result, neoliberal styles of civil society and attempts to build civic engagement have largely been ineffective (Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003). Given the differences, it is not surprising that affective domain, or attitudinal attributes, were not found to be influential in a UGRAD alum's ability to achieve program objectives. It is unlikely that one college-aged person would have the ability and/or social capital to reenter Kyrgyz society after just one year as a student in the U.S. and change the attitudes of people thoroughly steeped in the post-Soviet culture. However, it is conceivably

easier for UGRAD alumni to influence people in closed groups, to successfully promote ideals of neoliberal civic engagement, or to obtain buy-in from home country peers through the use of skills, abilities, and knowledge that are concrete, identifiable, and demonstrable. Learning in the cognitive and behavioral domains seems to be most useful in enabling UGRAD alumni to be change agents at that point in their lives.

An important conclusion drawn from this study is that U.S. community colleges were inappropriate placements for UGRAD participants in regard to their ability to achieve UGRAD program objectives. A theory that helps explain this finding is Stanford's theories on challenge and support (1966). Stanford's theory posits that the best learning conditions are ones in which there is a balance between the degree of challenge in the experience and the amount of support the learner receives. If a learner is not challenged in their environment, little is learned. At the same time, if a learner has an overly challenging environment and the level of support does not balance the challenge, little is learned. This was the case with the majority of research participants who were placed in community colleges. They felt little connection to their academic coursework, they found the learning to be beneath their abilities, and they were not pushed challenged or pushed to be part of any campus communities. By and large, these were the participants who were not deemed to have met program objectives. On the other hand, the research participants placed in four-year institutions tended to be challenged by both their coursework and the environment they encountered, but supported at adequate levels by their faculty and peer groups. This led to positive, empowering learning environments. The research participants who encountered these factors were by and large those who were deemed to have successfully achieved program objectives.

Two other theories that help explain why community colleges are inappropriate placements for UGRAD participants are Meyer's social charter theory (1970) and Dore's diploma disease. Meyer's theory states that educational institutions are viewed by the people in a society as possessing a charter, which is the perceived value of the product of the sum of the educational experiences at the school. An institution's social charter, then, confers a perceived status on the recipients of its educational products. Interestingly, social charter theory can be applied to the findings of this study in two unique ways. Similarly, Dore's diploma disease (1970) identifies the ways in which education is commonly undertaken for the sake of earning a credential instead of actual learning. Dore claimed that education for credentials instills in its participants virtues like punctuality, conformity, and obedience, while education for learning instills qualities like imagination, curiosity, and determination. Community colleges, by their very nature, specialize in vocational, certificate, and credential programs. Diploma disease then serves to lessen the social charter of community colleges even further.

In the case of institutional placement for UGRAD participants, the charter of the community colleges they attended in the U.S. was lower than the charter of the institutions they attended in the Kyrgyz Republic. The UGRAD program selects talented, high-achieving students, often from the top universities in the Kyrgyz Republic. Those who were placed in community colleges in the U.S. often referenced their disappointment with their placement in the interviews that were conducted for this project. Upon arrival in the U.S, they expected they would be engaged at an institution in the U.S. with a comparable charter to what their institution was at home. Instead, they found themselves at institutions with a charter lower than their expectation, and classmate and instructors

who expected very little out of them. This affected the attitudes of the students, and it had a negative impact on the development of knowledge and skills that could be transferred back to the Kyrgyz Republic. By ignoring the effects of social charter in UGRAD placements, it appears that participants were at a disadvantage to achieve program objectives.

Social charter also helps us understand a more positive finding of the UGRAD program. It was stated earlier that whether a research participant met UGRAD program objectives or not was based on the results of the KUAQ and their own perceptions. By many measures other than the KUAQ, almost all research participants could reasonably be labeled as successful participants and are doing quite well for themselves personally and professionally. For the most part, they have important positions, they are accomplished academically, and they make positive contributions to their communities. This can be explained in part by the social charter that the UGRAD program itself enjoys in the Kyrgyz Republic. Though UGRAD is not a school or institution, it is a recognized program that is for highly qualified, highly talented people. Regardless of the participants' experiences in the program or at the institutions they atteneded, many doors of opportunity were open to them when they arrived back in their home countries simply because of the charter of the UGRAD program. Many participants mentioned in the interviews that having UGRAD experience on their resumes and graduate school applications signaled to others a high degree of ability and accomplishment. In this sense, the social charter of the UGRAD program gives all participants an elevated status in the Kyrgyz Republic that affords them more personal, academic, and professional opportunities than non-UGRAD participants.

Another useful lens through which to contemplate the results of this study is the social contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005) and how that applies to the findings about home stays. This hypothesis posits that prejudice is lessened among the people of different groups through social contact with each other, especially when the contact occurs in an environment in which certain conditions are present. The four optimal conditions presented by Allport (1954) are the differing groups enjoy equal status, they share common goals, there is intergroup cooperation, and the contact occurs with the support of authorities and within the context of social institutions. Home stay environments, in which UGRAD participants live with local individuals or families, are largely absent three, if not four, of these important conditions. In terms of shared or equal status, the UGRAD participant is a guest in the host family's home, which is a markedly unequal status from the host who owns the home and all the possessions inside it. In terms of common goals, host families, in the cases of the UGRAD alumni who were interviewed, often appeared to host students more for financial reasons than cultural sharing, and they appeared to have had different day-to-day goals than an exchange college student. And finally, a private home is not a social institution, and the rules inside the home are the discretion of the host, not an overarching authority or social institution. When one views home stay as part of an international exchange program through this lens, it seems plausible that it is not the ideal environment for reducing prejudice and promoting mutual cultural understanding.

On the other hand, a living situation in which international students live on-campus with host country students has all the conditions necessary in Allport's hypothesis. A UGRAD participant and their host country roommate enjoy equal status as

students and dormitory room occupants; as students enrolled at an institution of higher education, they share common goals; they have multiple opportunities to cooperate through academics and residence life activities; and they are living together under the authority of their institution's rules and regulations. If Allport's hypothesis is valid, which Pettigrew and Tropp (2005) suggests is through their meta-analysis of existing body of empirical research on the topic, UGRAD participants would be best-served living with host country students in university residence halls. Host family living arrangements may be appropriate for younger exchange participants who need a structured, familial environment. But for participants of an exchange program like UGRAD, they should be in the residence hall environment where they will be exposed to the people who will help them develop a more nuanced understanding of people from different places, but also to ideas and activities that have been found in this study to be influential in developing life-long skills that will help them in their lives and careers.

Summary

Due to the relatively small sample of participants, this research project does not possess a high degree of external validity. However, due to the rich and useful data that were collected, important insights and understanding were gained. First, the UGRAD program, as structured, has demonstrated the ability to provide a great personal benefit for its participants. Also, many of the alumni purport to be champions of civic engagement, but not many were found to be engaged in building civil society at a national-level. However, there is a great deal of meaningful involvement at the community or institutional level. UGRAD alumni who participated in this research are

engaged as educators, scholars, scientists, technology developers, and community leaders. Therefore, I believe the UGRAD program to be a public good, as well.

Second, as the UGRAD program is structured, placing students in community colleges appears to be bad policy due in large part to the lack of an academically-challenging environment, limited on-campus housing facilities where international students can room with their U.S. peers, and little structured institutional support that facilitates the development of intercultural competence for international students. UGRAD focuses on the selection of academically accomplished students, and community colleges do not appear to be a good fit for their expectations and interests. This is not to say that all community colleges are equal, as they all certainly differ in their levels of academic rigor and institutional support. If UGRAD placement in community colleges is to continue, it is important to vet the institutions to the extent that it is certain they offer the programs and support the UGRAD student needs and expects.

And finally, UGRAD program administrators must be intentional in matching participants up with institutions that offer academic programs and coursework that align with their academic interests. The research participants consistently stated that their coursework in the U.S. that was related to either their specific academic interest or career goals was especially beneficial to them as it allowed them to learn things in their field they would not have been able to learn in the Kyrgyz Republic and it propelled their learn more and their desire to pursue their chosen field more deeply. At the same time, UGRAD should prioritize selection criteria for applicants who have clear academic or professional goals. A consistent finding here is that those who tied their learning and experiences in the U.S. to their own personal interests had the best outcomes.

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Appendix A – IRB Approval

Kevin Timlin <timli003@umn.edu>

1502E63261 - PI Timlin - IRB - Exempt Study Notification

2 messages

irb@umn.edu <irb@umn.edu> Tue, Mar 31, 2015 at 8:40 AM
To: timli003@umn.edu

TO : gwf@umn.edu, timli003@umn.edu,

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1502E63261

Principal Investigator: Kevin Timlin

Title(s):
A mixed methods study on how certain factors influence the acheivement of UGRAD program objectives as perceived by alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic

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This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota HRPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.

This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study?s expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.

You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at http://eresearch.umn.edu/ to view further details on your study.

The IRB wishes you success with this research.

We value your feedback. We have created a short survey that will only take a couple of minutes to complete. The

Appendix B – Kyrgyz UGRAD Alumni Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this questionnaire. All questions relate to you and your UGRAD experience. The questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes. If you are having difficulty answering the questions online, please contact Kevin Timlin at timli003@umn.edu and arrangements can be made for you to provide your answers in a different format.

Demographic or background questions

What is your gender?
Female
Male

How would you rate your UGRAD experience?
Poor
Fair
Good
Excellent

What years were you in the United States as part of the UGRAD program?
1993-1994
1994-1995
1995-1996
1996-1997
1998-1999
1999-2000
2000-2001
2001-2002
2002-2003
2003-2004
2004-2005
2005-2006
2006-2007
2007-2008
2009-2009
2009-2010
2010-2011
2011-2012
2012-2013
2013-2014

The high school you graduated from is in which oblast?
Batken
Chui
Jalal Abad

Issyk Kul
Naryn
Osh
Talas
Other _____

Approximately how many people lived in the city/town where you graduated from high school?
Less than 999
1,000 - 9,999
10,000 - 24,999
25,000 - 49,999
50,000 - 99,999
More than 100,000

The primary language of instruction at the high school you graduated from was:
Kyrgyz
Russian
Uzbek
Tajik
Turkish
English
Other _____

During high school, which language did you speak the most at home?
Kyrgyz
Russian
Uzbek
Tajik
Turkish
English
Other _____

Before the UGRAD program, which university did you attend in the Kyrgyz Republic?

Before the UGRAD program, what was your academic major?
How many years of university did you complete in the Kyrgyz Republic before going to the U.S. for UGRAD?
1
2
3
4
More than 4

How long were you in the U.S. as part of the UGRAD program?

Less than 1 month
1 month
2 months
3 months
4 months
5 months
6 months
7 months
8 months
9 months
10 months
More than 10 months

Which college/university did you attended in the U.S.? If you attended more than one, please list them all here.

Which of the choices below best describes your living arrangements while you were in the U.S. for the UGRAD program? If you had more than one living arrangement, please check the one that was for the longest period of time.
On-campus housing with other Russian speaking international students
Off-campus housing with other Russian speaking international students
On-campus with non-Russian speaking international students
Off-campus with non-Russian speaking international students
On-campus by yourself
Off-campus by yourself
On-campus with a mixture of international and U.S. students
Off-campus with a mixture of international and U.S. students
On-campus with U.S. student(s)
Off-campus with U.S. students
Off-campus with a host family

After UGRAD, did change your major?
If yes, to what?
Why did you change majors?

After UGRAD, did you transfer to a different university than the one you attended before UGRAD?
Yes
No
If yes, why?

What is the highest level of education you have attained?
High school diploma
Associate's degree
Bachelor's degree

Master's degree
Doctoral degree

Do you currently live in the Kyrgyz Republic?
Yes
No

If no, how much time have you spent in the Kyrgyz Republic since completing the UGRAD program?
Less than 1 year
1 - 2 years
3-5 years
More than 5 years

Please answer the following questions with the choice that best describes your thoughts.

Thematic area 1 – personal experiences
At the beginning of your UGRAD experience, to what degree did you have specific personal goals you wanted to accomplish as a result of the program?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, how much did you know about U.S. culture?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree did you meet and interact with people from outside your own culture?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree were you interested in learning about cultures other than your own?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree were you able to relate to other people's feelings?

Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree were you able to adapt to change?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree were you accepting of ideas, values, and beliefs different from your own?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree were you able to establish personal relationships with others?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before UGRAD, to what degree were you aware of how your own culture shaped your attitudes, beliefs, and actions?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

When you arrived in the U.S. for UGRAD, to what degree were your English language skills adequate for living and studying there?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Thematic area 2 – home/host country culture relationship
In the U.S., to what degree was the culture of your home community (in the Kyrgyz Republic) different from the culture you experienced in the U.S.?
Not at all
Very little
Some

A lot

In the U.S., to what degree was your town and university a good fit for you personally (i.e., the geography, population, weather, ambiance)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree were the people in your town open and receptive to people from outside the U.S.?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you have opportunities to participate in events and activities that helped you learn about U.S. culture?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you receive cultural support from people who worked at the institution you attended?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you have opportunities to meet and interact with U.S. Americans?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you spend time with people who helped you understand U.S. culture?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you belong to a social community that involved U.S. Americans?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you experience incidents that challenged your personal beliefs and/or cultural identity?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Thematic area 3 – program features
Before going to the U.S., to what degree did you understand the goals and objectives of the UGRAD program?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree were you satisfied with the information and support provided to you by the UGRAD sponsoring organization (e.g. IREX, ACTR, etc.)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you feel the English language training and/or support you received was adequate?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you feel the faculty and staff at your host university provided you with opportunities to interact with U.S. Americans?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you feel you had formal opportunities to reflect and critically analyze your cultural experience (e.g. journal writing, talking with other international students)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you feel your living arrangements contributed to your understanding of U.S. culture?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you feel your academic courses and program activities (i.e., internship, community service) were personally relevant to you?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

In the U.S., to what degree did you have the ability to choose your academic courses and program activities?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Before leaving the U.S. at the end of UGRAD, to what degree did you feel the orientation about returning to home to the Kyrgyz Republic was adequate and appropriate?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

UGRAD objective 1 questions
Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree is the promotion of mutual cultural understanding between the people of the Kyrgyz Republic and the U.S. important to you?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you shared information about the U.S. with others in formal settings (e.g. group presentations, published articles, etc.)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you shared information about the U.S. with others in informal settings (e.g., in conversations with friends and acquaintances, on social media, etc.)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you shared information about the Kyrgyz Republic with people from the U.S. and other countries in formal settings (e.g. group presentations, published articles, etc.)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you shared information about the Kyrgyz Republic with people from the U.S. and other countries in informal settings (e.g., in conversations with friends and acquaintances, on social media, etc.)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

UGRAD objective 2 questions
To what degree do you consider yourself to be a person who advocates for change in the Kyrgyz Republic?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree do you perceive your UGRAD experience has helped you become an effective leader?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree do you perceive your UGRAD experience has helped you gain confidence to express your views with others?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree do you perceive your UGRAD experience has helped you tolerate differences and opposing viewpoints?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree do you agree with the following statement – I believe I am more willing to promote change in the Kyrgyz Republic than my peers who did not participate in the UGRAD program?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

UGRAD objective 3 questions
Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you been involved in volunteer or community activities?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you participated in the democratic functions of your community and country?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what extent have you advocated for a free and independent press (newspapers, radio, television) in the Kyrgyz Republic?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree did participation in the UGRAD program contribute to your current understanding of civil society (i.e. community service, free press, democratic functions, etc.)?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what extent do you agree with the following statement – I believe I have a better understanding of civil society than my peers who did not participate in the UGRAD program?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

UGRAD objective 4 questions
To what degree has your UGRAD experience helped you to generate enduring ties with U.S. Americans?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree have you remained in contact with U.S. Americans you met during your UGRAD experience?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Since participating in UGRAD, to what degree have you had personal contact with U.S. Americans living in the Kyrgyz Republic?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree have you facilitated U.S. Americans visiting the Kyrgyz Republic?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what extent do you agree with the following statement – I believe I am more able to create enduring ties with U.S. Americans than my peers who did not participate in the UGRAD program?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

UGRAD objective 5 questions
To what degree has your UGRAD experience helped you to develop skills that are useful for a professional career?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree has your UGRAD experience helped you to develop the ability to work effectively with other people?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree has your UGRAD experience helped you to develop leadership skills?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what degree has your UGRAD experience helped you to develop skills to use technology effectively?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

To what extent do you agree with the following statement – I believe I have more skills related to professional development than my peers who did not participate in the UGRAD program?
Not at all
Very little
Some
A lot

Open ended questions (preferably in English)

In your own words, describe the impact that the UGRAD experience has had on your life.
What specific aspects of your UGRAD experience do you feel had the biggest influence on your life?
What is the nature of your civic engagement since your UGRAD participation?
What have you been doing professionally since your UGRAD experience?
Are you willing to be interviewed (either online or by telephone) about your UGRAD experience?
If yes,
Thank you! Please enter information here on the best way to contact you.
Are you willing to help Kevin Timlin get in touch with other UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic?
If yes,
Thank you! Please enter information here on the best way to contact you.

Appendix C – Contact letter

Dear XXXXXXXX

My name is Kevin Timlin, and I am a doctoral candidate in international education at the University of Minnesota. For my dissertation research, I am studying how certain factors influence the experience and outcomes for participants from the Kyrgyz Republic in the UGRAD program. I became interested in the UGRAD program when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic from 1997-1999. Now I am an administrator of international programs at Northern Michigan University, and I hope that the results of this research project will help me and other administrators understand the types of experiences we should provide future UGRAD participants to ensure they have meaningful, worthwhile experiences while in the U.S.

As a past participant in the UGRAD program, I am writing you to ask if you will participate in my research project. I hope to get as many UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic as possible to complete an online questionnaire that will take approximately 20 minutes. This research project has been reviewed by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board and has been approved as being ethical and fair to research participants. Also, please know the answers you give to the questionnaire will be kept completely confidential.

If you are willing to participate in my project, please reply to this message. I will then send you a link to the survey. Also, if you know any other UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic, I would truly appreciate your help in contacting them. Please share this information with them, and encourage them to get in touch with me.

Thank you very much for your time and attention on this. If you have any questions or concerns about my research, or just want to talk, please contact me.

Regards,

Kevin Timlin

Appendix D – Invitation Letter

Dear XXXXXXXX,

Thank you for agreeing to take the questionnaire for my research project. **Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary, and refusal to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of Minnesota or the researchers in any way. Also, the information you provide will be kept safely and confidentially.** If you have any questions about the questionnaire or research project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

To complete the questionnaire, please click on the following link: xxx.xxxx.com.

For question number 1, please enter the following identifying number: XXXXXX. The use of this number will ensure that all your responses remain completely confidential.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate, and I will be sure to share the results of my research when it is complete!

Regards,

Kevin Timlin

Appendix E – Request Letter

Dear XXXXXXXX,

My name is Kevin Timlin. I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic from 1997-1999 (TEFL volunteer, lived in Kizzyl Suu, Jety Oguz raion, Issyk Kul oblast). I am currently a doctoral candidate in international education at the University of Minnesota. For my dissertation research, I am studying how certain factors can influence the experience and outcomes of participants in the UGRAD program from the Kyrgyz Republic. The goal of my research is to provide program administrators of governmentally sponsored exchange programs like UGRAD with tools and understanding they need to ensure participants have a meaningful and beneficial experience.

In order to conduct my research, I am asking for your help contacting any of the UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic you may know. I have obtained from the U.S. State Department a complete list of all the participants' names and other information, but I do not have up-to-date contact information. Once I am in touch with the alumni, I will simply ask them to provide answers to an online questionnaire. Please know that the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board has approved my research project, which means every precaution has been taken to protect the confidentiality and well being of the participants.

So, if you are willing and able to help me contact the UGRAD alumni you know from the Kyrgyz Republic, I would appreciate your help in one of two ways:

1) Email me at timli003@umn.edu and provide me with any contact information of the UGRAD alumni you know.
2) Share this email with the UGRAD alumni you know, and encourage them to get in touch with me. They, too, can email me at timli003@umn.edu. If you do this, I would greatly appreciate your contacting me to let know whom you have been in touch with.

Again, I want to reiterate that the purpose of this research is to improve the services and programming for students who participate in these programs, and there absolutely no risk of harm for the alumni to participate in the research.

Thanks you very much for your attention to this matter, and for your willingness to help. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

Kevin Timlin

Appendix F – Informed Consent Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH
A mixed methods study on how certain factors influence the achievement of UGRAD program objectives as perceived by alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic

You are invited to be in a research study of UGRAD program alumni from Kyrgyz Republic. You were selected as a research participant because you were on a list that obtained from U.S. State Department as a UGRAD alumni from the Kyrgyz Republic. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kevin Timlin, doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we ask you to do the following things:
Answer questions on an online questionnaire. Approximately 15 participants who complete the questionnaire will then be asked to answer questions in an interview. The interview will be recorded, and the conversation will be transcribed in order to adequately understand the information provided in the interview.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Any interview recordings will be digital, and the files will be stored securely, and will accessible only by the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researchers conducting this study are Kevin Timlin and Gerald Fry. If you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact them at:
Kevin Timlin
University of Minnesota
(906) 236-2002
ktimli003@umn.edu

Gerald Fry
University of Minnesota

(612) 624-0294
gwf@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for you records.

Appendix G – Interview Protocol

Introductory Protocol

<NAME>, thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. It is important for you to know that your participation is voluntary, and you may end our discussion at any time. Do you understand this?

Also, I promise to keep all the information from both your survey and interview completely confidential. However, in order to ensure accuracy and understanding, I plan to record our conversation today. Only the researchers on this project will have access to the recordings. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Finally, this interview will last approximately one hour. During this time, I will ask you questions related to your experiences in the UGRAD program, and the impact you perceive your participation has had on your life since. I promise to be mindful of your precious time.

Introduction to the interview

Prior to 2011, 165 people from the Kyrgyz Republic participated in the UGRAD program. Last year, you were one of 72 of the program alumni who completed my online survey. Thank you so much for taking time to do that survey. Based on the results of the survey, I selected you as one of 12 alumni for in-depth interviews. The people selected for interviews are those who reported a wide range of experiences in regard to their UGRAD experience. My questions will focuses on the details of your exchange experience, what you perceive the benefits of participation to be, and the impact that the program has had on your life. The interview will be semi-structured, which means I have

a few scripted questions, but I also want to be able to talk about whatever you want to talk about in an open, conversational style.

Questions:

1. Why did you apply to participate in the UGRAD program?
2. Tell me about your UGRAD experience in the US.
3. What were some of your most positive experiences in the US?
4. What were some of your most unsatisfying experiences in the US?
5. Tell me about your life since UGRAD.
6. Do you see yourself as a change agent in the Kyrgyz Republic? Why or why not? If yes, how and in what ways specifically?
7. In what ways were your UGRAD experiences related to your role of a change agent?
8. What impact did UGRAD have on your professional skill development? What specific skills were you able to develop as a result of the program?
9. In what ways (if any) do you feel more prepared for your professional life and responsibilities than Kyrgyz Republic citizens who were not UGRAD participants?
10. Now I would like to talk to you about your intercultural experiences. What kind of intercultural learning took place during the program? What impact has the intercultural competence you gained from your UGRAD experience had on your professional life?